INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI®

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

Negotiating the Boundaries of Gender: Construction and Representation of Women in the Work of Michael Ondaatje

Shannon Emmerson

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

November 1997

© Shannon Emmerson, 1997

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-39917-6

Canada

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Shannon Emmerson

Entitled: Negotiating the Boundaries of Gender: Construction and Representation of Women in the Work of Michael Ondaatje

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (English)

Complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair

_____ Examiner

_____ Examiner

_____ Supervisor

Approved by _____
Chair of Department of Graduate Program Director

_____ 19_____ _____
Dean of Faculty

ABSTRACT

Negotiating the Boundaries of Gender: Construction and Representation of Women in the Work of Michael Ondaatje

Shannon Emmerson

This study is a theoretical and text-based exploration of Michael Ondaatje's construction and representation of female characters in four fictional works: *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Coming Through Slaughter, In the Skin of a Lion, and The English Patient.* The primary focus is on the demarcating lines or 'boundaries' drawn between male and female characters, which results in the self-consciously incomplete portrayal of the female, in all of these texts. Issues to be addressed include the gendered identification of the author with male, rather than female characters, the difficulties of representing female characters within a masculine discourse, and Ondaatje's chronologically increasing awareness of gender issues within his texts.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank my advisor, Nicola Nixon, for all of her assistance and understanding. I would also like to thank Martin Brooks, and Heather Loughran, for living with this thesis, and without whose endless support and patience this thesis would never have been completed.

Table of Contents

General Introduction 1

Male Chaos and the 'Blurred' Female in
The Collected Works of Billy the Kid 8

Creating The Ideal Mirror: Coming Through Slaughter 26

Half-Revealed Creatures in In the Skin of a Lion 44

Reflections of the Unknown:
Female Characters in The English Patient 70

Endnotes 98

Works Cited 102

Bibliography 105

I write about you
as if I own you
which I do not.
As you can say of nothing
this is mine.

When we rise
the last hug
no longer belongs,
is your fiction
or my story.
Mulch for the future.

Whether we pass
through each other
like pure arrows
or face into rumour
I write down now
a fiction of your arm

or of that afternoon
in Union Station
when we both were lost
pain falling free
the speed of tears
under the Grand Rotunda
as we disappeared
rose from each other

you and your arrow
taking just
what you fled through

(Michael Ondaatje, *Secular Love*, 143)

How can I touch you if you're not there?
Your blood has become their meaning.
They can speak to each other, and about
us. But what about us? Come out of their
language.

(Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 204)

Within his poem, "Secular Love," Michael Ondaatje attempts to create that which can be claimed from that which cannot. From the living subject of the woman -- the 'she' who would not be owned -- Ondaatje's narrator creates the fictional female subject who might indeed be owned.[1] He constructs a 'fiction of her arm' which can belong to him. But the narrator acknowledges that even this construction is incomplete, since the fiction is only a fragment of this female subject's life that has entered and 'passed' through his writer's imagination. Although the writer records what *he* sees, *her* vision – and by extension, the female version of this fiction -- is not represented. The writer may, then, "own" the "fiction," but he must ultimately acknowledge its incompleteness. In terms of Ondaatje's construction and representation of women in his literary works, this 'incompleteness' also proves to be consistent. The female in many of his texts, and in particular the early ones, is, in Irigaray's terms, simply not there: she is untouchable. In works such as *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems* and *Coming Through Slaughter* she exists, certainly, but remains a shadowy presence whose main function is to support the central stories of the male protagonists. In later works, such as *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*, the female emerges as more central in terms of plot and depth of character, but remains, again, on the outside of the essentially masculine story. For all of Ondaatje's work 'outside the margins' – for all his play with the 'norms' of specific genres, the telling of conventional histories, and even the mapping of conventional plot development -- the female remains 'othered' in Ondaatje's works. This otherness does not, however, exclude any identification. Instead, Ondaatje's repeated emphasis on the boundaries of gender seems to express at once his determination to attempt to understand her, and the futility of any such attempts.

In Ondaatje's fiction, characters are often 'unfinished': questions about the 'truth' of their lives are left unanswered. For Ondaatje, that 'truth' of their lives -- lives such as Buddy Bolden's or Billy the Kid's -- simply may not be known. He has, nonetheless, explored and challenged in much of his written work the boundaries of self and identity, in terms of his construction and representation of his subject's lives -- lives which tend in many ways to mirror or to touch his own. In *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, for example, Billy is linked textually to the author via a photograph inserted on the final page: a photograph of young Ondaatje dressed as his protagonist. Similarly, in *Coming Through Slaughter*, Buddy Bolden is connected to the author through passages in the text which openly discuss the similarities in age and gesture between Bolden and Ondaatje. Both texts, like the poem that constitutes my epigraph here, examine the often bridgeable dividing lines between selves, or better, the connections that might be made between self and constructed character. The self of the author, in other words, may often mesh and blend with the self of his constructed character – but only when the character is male. His male characters may not be fully known, but they gesture always to a gendered identification between them and their author. Female characters remain, on the other hand, firmly outside Ondaatje's boundaries of self.

As many literary critics have noted, Ondaatje continually interrogates and challenges the demarcating lines between author and subject. Few critics, however, have gone on to comment on Ondaatje's interrogations of the boundaries between the sexes -- even though issues of sex and of gender figure centrally as part of the author's exploration of identity. As Lorraine York points out, there has been a decided absence of gender criticism within the field of Ondaatje criticism. In an attempt to explain this absence, York suggests that feminist critics have simply "assumed that there wasn't much to write about" in Ondaatje's work, that they see

his writing as working within a male-defined model of gender which presents no challenge to traditional and often negative representations of women (72). York points to a feature of his writing which she labels "the male chaotic" to further explain the absence of gender criticism. The male chaotic is, she writes, "a realm of seemingly random, centrifugal violent energy, associated with males and either opposed or ignored by females" which has worked to keep "feminist analysis at a distance" from Ondaatje's work (77). Certainly, female stereotypes, and an active-male / passive-female binary code pervades such texts as *The Collected Works* and *Coming Through Slaughter*. But in Ondaatje's work as a whole, it may be helpful to analyse women on the basis of the authorial construction of gender, as well as on the level of representation, for, as I will insist, Ondaatje continually questions and challenges his own female representations.

This is not to say that Ondaatje, in challenging his own negative representations of women, is truly empowering, or even making more palatable, his female characters. Instead, as a male, postmodernist writer, he can be seen as grappling with the difficulties of representing women, while ultimately regarding himself as unable to overcome them. Indeed, Linda Hutcheon observes that postmodernism generally reveals

> a desire to understand present culture as the product of previous representations...What this means is that postmodern art acknowledges and accepts the challenge of tradition: the history of representation cannot be escaped but it can be both exploited and commented on critically. (*Politics,* 58)

As a postmodern writer, then, Ondaatje may well be challenging traditional, and overwhelmingly negative representations of the female gender by using and exploiting them. In perhaps a feminist fashion, this challenge does reflect an attempt to contest "mastery and totalization, often by unmasking both their powers and their limitations" (*Politics* 37).

Hutcheon, however, identifies the crucial difference between postmodernism and feminism as based on the actual project of changing the systems of meaning which define gender in ways detrimental to female empowerment. In essence, she argues that feminism seeks to change those systems, while postmodernism, with what Terry Eagleton calls postmodernism's "political ambivalences" (*Illusions* 132), remains implicated in the systems which it critiques (*Politics* 152-153).

According to Teresa De Lauretis, individuals are ultimately constructed as gendered subjects within various "technologies of gender" which have the "power to control the field of social meaning and thus produce, promote, and 'implant' representations of gender" (18). She goes on to suggest, however, that

> the terms of a different construction of gender also exist, in the margins of hegemonic discourses. Posed from outside the heterosexual social contract, and inscribed in micropolitical practices, these terms can also have a part in the construction of gender, and their effects are rather at the "local" level of resistances, in subjectivity and self-representation. (18)

It is my argument that Ondaatje, working within a postmodern tradition that privileges marginalized narrative and challenges the inscribed boundaries of literary tradition, operates on two levels: he both inscribes traditional representations of gender on the level of narrative and resists, through subjectivity and self-representation, the effects of that inscription. What this means in terms of an examination of Ondaatje's construction of the female, more simply, is that Ondaatje works within a system of representation which appears to valorize the ideology of male dominance, or even to foster the notion of the 'male chaotic,' yet he equally interrogates that ideology. His female characters, for example, are often represented as 'mirrors' to male characters that are shown to be untrustworthy, particularly in terms of the accuracy or 'completeness' of their reflections. Ondaatje thus provides the reader with an implicit

acknowledgement that the female representations are faulty, while remaining implicated in the narrative process that creates those representations. By examining Ondaatje's construction and representation of the female in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Coming Through Slaughter, In the Skin of a Lion,* and *The English Patient* chronologically, I will contend that he becomes increasingly involved, on a textual level, with the challenges of allowing the female a "subjectivity" and a "self-representation" within his own "technologies of gender."

I have chosen these four works as examples of Ondaatje's fiction. Admittedly, Ondaatje's work does not fall easily into categories of genre. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Coming Through Slaughter* are works which possess both strong elements of poetry and collage, and all of the books listed here could certainly be presented as examples of a documentary form. Most of his works have also been cited for their autobiographical content, questioning their categorization as 'pure' fiction. In the same vein, one could argue that *Running in the Family* (1982), a fictional memoir of Ondaatje's Sri Lankan family, is also an example of Ondaatje's fiction, and should, perhaps, be included in this list along with his other fiction. But my interest here is with those self-consciously fictional, female characters, rather than with those that are perhaps linked too closely to 'real' figures.

Beginning with *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, I examine the female characters of Sallie Chisum and Angela Dickinson, with particular reference to their stereotypical representation in terms of the angel/whore dichotomy. This chapter outlines the ways in which a binary construction of the central male and the oppositional female may be effectively applied to this text, and additionally introduces the extent to which Ondaatje's layered narrative mediation prohibits the reader's full access to rounded, credible female characters. The following chapter explores the female gender as constructed in *Coming Through Slaughter*, a text

that demonstrates a marked difference in terms of the author's awareness of the limitations of stereotypical representations of women. This can be seen in the still peripheral, yet more fully developed, characters of Nora Bass and Robin Brewitt. This chapter also reveals a characteristic of Ondaatje's work which dominates gender construction in the following two texts: the author's acknowledgement that his representations of women are mediated through his own specifically masculine gaze, voice, and discourse. In my discussion of *In the Skin of a Lion*, I elaborate on the functioning of this authorial mediation, in terms of the representation of the principal female characters: Clara, Alice, and Hana. Moving finally to *The English Patient*, a novel in which all three of these female characters again appear, I focus on the self-consciousness of Ondaatje's portrayal of Hana specifically. It is a self-consciousness that both acknowledges the existence of complex gendered boundaries within the text and emphasizes Ondaatje's authorial reluctance to claim, finally, the ability to efface those boundaries.

In all of these texts, women appear to the reader as if through 'claude glass,' a dark mirror that has the effect of concentrating "the features of the landscape in subdued tones" (*Secular Love* 111). Women are present, then, but they are represented as filtered through multiple layers of mediation – layers provided by the author, the narrator, and often the male protagonist – so that, in the terms of Irigaray, they are rendered 'untouchable' through the layers. De Lauretis additionally argues that, to achieve an accurate rendering of the female within any male-centred representation, there must be an exploration of the "space not represented yet implied" (26). Ondaatje gestures toward this space in his work, but does not, in the end, depart from a masculine focus to fully explore a specifically female 'space' in order to achieve a 'complete' rendering of the female. His female characters are trapped in a male discourse that is, in spite of his willingness to analyse and critique it, incapable of representing the female completely.

~ONE~

Male Chaos and the 'Blurred' Female

in *The Collected Works Of Billy The Kid*

Most of the critical work dealing with the representation of female characters in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* has tended to focus on the female in comparison to the male -- on how, more specifically, female characters in the text react to Billy and aid in defining and/or deconstructing the various myths of his life. This branch of critical inquiry seems to be characterized best by Lorraine York's contention that Ondaatje's female characters offer passive contrasts to the active male figure/s (77). In *The Collected Works*, such an argument does have some justification. However, as I want to argue, once one departs from an examination of representation to one of construction, one begins to see Ondaatje's authorial interrogation of his own figurations. He undermines, for example, both the typical codifications of the feminine through his deployment of a postmodern parody of typical 'Western' representations of gender. His style of narrative also, as I will illustrate, challenges any conventional notion of 'truth' through the use of multiple and often conflicting sources. While *The Collected Works* is Ondaatje's least gender-conscious fictional text, then, it nevertheless reflects an interest in and an awareness of the issues of gender, and particularly in those concerning male mastery and ownership, conventional versions of femininity, and gender-inflected boundaries of identity.

Teresa De Lauretis suggests that, in any examination or deconstruction of a text, gender "must be accounted for. It must be understood not as a 'biological' difference that lies before or beyond signification, nor as a culturally constructed object of masculine desire, but as semiotic difference" (48). Gender is, in other words, rendered through semiotic construction. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid,* although loosely based on the so-called 'facts' of William Bonney's life and death, is a construct in which characters act according to the gendered codes created by Ondaatje, and not exclusively according to biological or social definitions of gender

difference. And yet critics continue to elaborate on the 'clear' distinctions between males and females in Ondaatje's works, assuming a model that poses the male as dominant and active and the female as subordinate and reactive. Judith Owens, for example, maintains that Sallie Chisum and Angela Dickinson function exclusively in terms of their respective relationships with Billy; they merely illustrate Billy's "strong desire for order" (117). According to Owens, Angela generally 'threatens' this need for order, and Sallie offers "the immutability Billy needs" (124, 130). Christian Bok, like Owens, views female artistry only as it relates to that of Ondaatje's male protagonists: "Women as artists in fact do not appear to figure largely in Ondaatje's aesthetic vision; instead, women appear to represent the passive victims of male volatility" (116). While it is true that Ondaatje's representation of gender in *The Collected Works* does not elaborate on or fulfil the potential for female artistic creation, there are nonetheless crucial aspects of the female characters' functions in the text that cannot be accommodated within a simple opposition between masculine aggressivity versus female passivity.

Sallie Chisum seems, for example, to be domestic and 'housed', standing in opposition to Billy as the travelling outlaw. York describes her as "[moving] about the house from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m., doing the jobs that her husband, John, has left on a list for her" (87-88); and when York examines Ondaatje's textual description of Sallie's "large bones somehow taking on the quietness of the house" (33), she concludes that Sallie's "bodily house is housed, and both legal and domestic writing decree that both houses belong to her husband" (York, 88). York is arguing here that Ondaatje often uses the house as a metaphor for male ownership of women, and that with Sallie, there is little authorial questioning of that ownership, since Sallie remains quietly bound to the house, "caring for Billy... and carrying out delicate domestic ceremonies" (88).

While York's insight that Ondaatje has a tendency to 'house' or 'contain' his female characters is compelling, I would still question whether this containment serves exclusively to posit symbolic ownership. Ondaatje, in fact, repeatedly questions his own authorial power to assume any ownership of the female characters in his texts precisely through an examination of containment. First of all, it is not clear that Sallie is John's wife; and secondly, it is unclear whether Sallie truly 'belongs' to anybody. Sallie actually seems less John's wife than his sister or female relative. She remains, for example, Miss Sallie Chisum or Sallie in every reference to her, until the narrator points out that she will "[l]ater" (presumably after telling her stories to the narrator) become "*Mrs.* Roberts" (30, emphasis mine). That she remains *Miss* Sallie Chisum throughout the text, like Miss Angela Dickinson, who also remains unmarried, clearly indicates that she is unmarried -- at least at the time of telling her stories to the narrator, and most likely during the time of her interaction with Billy.

Her unmarried status does not, of course, necessarily indicate that she is any more aggressive or any freer to act independently within the text's male-centred society. It does, however, support the argument that Ondaatje's representation of Sallie reflects many of the same complexities and contradictions as do the author's representations of male characters. Ondaatje certainly introduces the possibility that the Chisum house *is seen as* belonging to John, in the passage where the narrator (either Billy or Pat Garrett) recalls the story of Livingstone and his breeding of mad dogs. The narrator refers here, for example, to "this midnight at John Chisum's" and to "John's clock [banging] away in the kitchen" (59). Yet Ondaatje's narrative strategy throughout the text is one in which one character's perspective appears to be the truth until it is called into question by another's character's very different truth. Thus, John's apparent ownership of the house is already undermined by a previous section that relates Miss

Sallie Chisum's recollections of "frontier days," introducing her italicized reminiscences with the title "On *Her* House" (30, emphasis mine). If Ondaatje actually destabilizes the idea of ownership as gender inflected, then, it is interesting that critics like York and Bok are so quick to establish a conventional stability.

It is also interesting to note that such critics equally insist on the conventional passivity of females in this text when a character such as Angela D. so aggressively occupies one of the two main female roles. In fact, Angela's sexual aggression, combined with her large size and appetites, potentially poses a threat to the smaller and often sexually feminized Billy. As Judith Owens suggests:

> Billy's extreme physical passivity forms a contrast to the violence of Angie's movements, in a way that reverses traditional notions of male and female sexual roles. Billy, we suspect, fears emasculation by Angie, feels that she has usurped his -- the male's -- role. (125)

Owens refers here to the passage in which Billy describes Angela's "tall gawky body" as "spitting electric": "her body nearly breaking off my fingers / pivoting like machines in final speed" (16). In the same passage, Billy is presented as describing his own

> hands cracked in love juice
> fingers paralysed by it arthritic
> these beautiful fingers I couldnt move
> faster than a crippled witch now. (16)

Such actions would, arguably, be threatening to the finger-conscious Billy, who is described by Pat Garrett as "never [using] his left hand for anything except of course to shoot" and who did "finger exercises subconsciously, on the average 12 hours a day" (43). And Owens reads the scene as one of threat, contending that "Billy in part images himself as female" which "points to his feeling of helplessness in the face of Angie's onslaught" (125). However, Ondaatje does not suggest that Billy associates femaleness with helplessness; instead he admires Angela for

her control and agility. She is, for example, described by Billy as balancing on edges: "her leg dangling off the rail she sits on, Angela D, the long leg about a foot to my left swaying, the heel tapping the wooden rail" (67). Admiringly, he wonders later "how she can balance on the rail" (67-68), and goes on to describe her trapeze-like positions during sex in the night, as "slowly and carefully she lifts her legs higher and hangs them on tight to my shoulders like clothespins" (68) -- just as he has earlier described her "toppling slow back to the pillow" (21) and as having

> folded on the sheet
> tapping away at her knees
> leans back waving feet at me
> catching me like a butterfly (25).

Rather than signifying female helplessness, these passages clearly reflect femaleness, at least in terms of the sexual body, as controlled and in control.

The textual association of Angela with 'edges' also presents an interesting parallel between her character and that of Billy. As Dennis Cooley points out, Billy is frequently "staring warily at the edge, constantly on edge. In every way an outlaw, he tries, at times distends and transgresses, boundaries. More often, he fears to cross the lines, hopes to defend his hard-held borders against all trespassers" (212). Centering his analysis around a passage in which Billy describes himself "on the edge of the cold dark / watching the white landscape in its frame" (74) -- as "here on the edge of sun / that would ignite me" (74) -- Cooley argues that "Billy's marginal situation is here represented by the doorway he sits watching, in a position he assumes throughout much of the book. That doorway provides him with a frame for the white landscape burning outside, a rigid framework which sharply defines that outer space" (212).

If Cooley insists that Billy is characterized by his intense focus on edges, Smaro Kamboureli insists that Angela is represented by edges: Angela "is a woman of edges... the

edges of earth formations, the borderline marking low and high, warm and cold, the difference of elements. Edges are what Angela D. and Billy primarily share" (194). For Kamboureli, one of those edges is that between life and death; and in her reading of the scene in which Angela leans against the door, then walks "slow to the window" to let in the "bent oblong of sun" which "hoists itself across the room" (21), Kamboureli sees her as "the angel of Death," administering Billy's death rites.

While Kamboureli argues, quite rightly, that from "Billy's vantage point, borders cease to mean, to demarcate difference" (191), I want to suggest that from the reader's vantage point, the borders or edges of gender are made equally problematic. Both Angela and Billy 'live on the edge' of society; Billy lives as a violent outlaw, while Angela may be viewed as a kind of sexual outlaw. She is a prostitute, who is supposedly engaged to be married to Billy (thus transgressing the boundaries of both roles), who also defies the 'rules' of society by being the first woman to reportedly shave her legs, and who is represented as rejecting the role of passive female to her aggressive male counterpart. Her very similarity to Billy draws our attention to the borders that Ondaatje represents as ambiguous -- those between masculinity and femininity. In an interview with Catherine Bush, Ondaatje observes that he is drawn to figures, like Billy, "who court danger, who live on the edge somehow" (241). And Angela too is just such a figure, given Ondaatje's abundant attention to her dangerousness, which preoccupies both Billy and Pat Garrett. No mere female prop, Angela lives on a double "edge somehow" -- on both the edge of this constructed society and on the outside edge of the hyper-masculine society that is already posited textually as the dangerous edge.

In *The Collected Works* the female is often presented as an outsider or foreigner to the rule of male violence. Even in the graveyard at Boot Hill, she is a foreign species: "In Boot Hill

there are only two graves that belong to women and they are the only known suicides in that graveyard" (9). Ondaatje is careful, however, not to identify the female as consistently and unproblematically opposed to the male; even in the Boot Hill reference, he points out that the two women are the only *known* suicides, implying that the men dead among them may have committed suicide in a less detectable manner. In the case of Angela, similarly, we see that, although she expresses a seemingly feminine terror in response to Billy's calculated and calm killing of Sallie's snake-poisoned cat (according to Pat Garrett), she also urges Billy to "kill him Bonney kill him" after she is shot in the wrist by one of Billy's enemies (45, 66). In the latter passage, Angela enters the world of violence passionately after becoming a victim of it. In the same way, the author offers her reaction to violence as a "motive" for Billy's violence, in the passage where Billy witnesses the murder of his friend Tunstall (54).[1] It may be, in fact, that Angela realizes in Billy's shooting of the cat, Ferns, that she is already a part of this violent world by virtue of her attachment to Billy; such sobering knowledge thus provides an explanation for the "simply terrified" (45) expression on her face that Garret describes.

Although women may be outsiders to this world, then, it would seem that the borders between women and men, in terms of gendered absolutes, are somewhat permeable. Angela's constructed role as a kind of female outlaw weaves along the same semiotic path as Billy's constructed outlaw role. Similarly, Ondaatje's Sallie reflects and in some cases replicates Billy and Pat. Although Sallie does appear to be presented as a kind of 'ministering angel' of the Chisum house, or as a "maternal" figure who, as Cooley puts it, "nurses Billy and other broken creatures back to life" (232), Sallie and Billy, like Angela and Billy, are not quite as opposite as they may seem.

Billy's legend proclaims him wild -- a violent outlaw who has killed many. But, as even

the back jacket of the book declares, "Billy epitomized the dual nature of his time and place; he was a lover as well as a killer, as shy and gentle as he was vicious." Although Ondaatje repeatedly and blatantly interrogates the myths surrounding Billy, he equally questions and challenges, if more implicitly, the myth of female domesticity. Billy might crave, for example, the domesticity that Sallie represents to him, but Sallie counterbalances that craving with her own desire for the wild freedom that Billy represents to her.

It is Billy who conveys, through his recollections, a reverence for the domestic routines of Sallie Chisum. Such reverence may be seen in his careful and meticulous mental account of her chores and actions within the house as he and Angela approach the ranch (32-33). It is also Billy who expresses a profoundly disturbing "pain of change" when the routines and habits of the domestic life on the ranch are forced to alter (68). That there are two additional visitors intruding on a typical evening at the ranch, for example, bothers Billy profoundly, as he reveals in his pained but nostalgic description of an evening of excessive drinking spent with Pat Garrett, Angela D., Sallie, and John at the Chisum ranch: "The thing here is to explain the difference of this evening . . . [t]hat in fact the Chisum verandah is crowded" (67). It is not, he explains, that the verandah is small – it "could of course hold a hundred more, but that John and Sallie and I have been used to other distances, that we have talked slowly through nights expecting the long silences and we have taken our time thinking the replies" (67).

Billy's careful recollections here of how things "usually" were, or "used to" be (67), when set in contrast with this evening of "awkwardness" (71), clearly reveal what he himself refers to as a "pain of change" (68) -- a sense that all of the details of life on the ranch, which he has so lovingly depicted as somehow immutable, have somehow altered with the introduction of two 'foreigners' to the domestic environment. It is significant also that these

two foreigners are both involved in tearing Billy away from this known domestic world of routines: Angela, in forcing a distance between Billy and Sally, and Pat Garrett, in enforcing the wishes of "cattle politicians like Chisum" who wanted cattle rustlers like Billy out of town (7). As Stephen Scobie puts it, the two of them may represent the "elements of disruption" or the "one altered move"' which upset the harmony and comfortable domesticity of Billy's life with the Chisums (200). Critics such as Owens and York have also noted that, in contrast to Billy's 'domestic desires,' Sallie's desires are for the wilderness that Billy represents to her. York, for example, comments that "Sallie, like Billy, longs for wilderness" (88) -- she demands annually "of John that she be given a pet of some strange exotic breed" (*Collected* 36). For all that Sallie seems to long for evidence of an outside world from which she is essentially cut off, Ondaatje underscores this apparent longing with Sallie's own objection to it: she claims that the "house was full of people all the time / the ranch was a little world in itself / I couldn't have been lonesome if I had tried" (30), implying that she would personally reject the assumption that she was unhappy, bored or dissatisfied with her life on the ranch. Ondaatje also suggests, through the curiously parallel references to Pat Garrett's penchant for "exotic" birds (88), that Sallie's need for "strange exotic" pets in this landscape is not unique to her.

Pat Garrett, for example, is described (presumably by Billy) as receiving frozen birds, "huge exotic things," in crates delivered on the train, which he then unpacks and examines with "great care" (88). This deliberate importation of the 'exotic' clearly echoes Sallie's determined importation of animals (although in her case, they are alive); the basset, Henry, is "imported from England by ship, then train, then Sallie had met the train and brought it the last seventy miles in a coach" (59). Garrett's interest in such animals is obviously different from Sallie's, since he receives them frozen and delights in the perfection of their lifeless forms: his seagull,

for example, is described as "beautifully spread in the ice, not a feather out of place, its claws extended and brittle from the freezing" (88). For Sallie, the animals seem significant because they are strange, broken or wounded, because they have become "exotic by their breaking" (36). Henry, the basset, is described as the "[s]trangest looking thing," as deliberately 'broken' in breeding by "fat noblemen" who intentionally created "the slowest kind of hound they could think of" (59). The two owls, likewise, which Billy mistakes for one vast bird, are each blind in one eye (37), and the collection of birds in the Chisum's cages are described as "wild and broken animals" (36). Billy and Pat are also 'broken animals', for they appear first wounded and are, like "every animal that came within a certain radius of that house...given a welcome" (36). Sallie, then, might be seen as collecting these animals out of a sense of compassion -- and perhaps empathy, since she is also presented in the text as directly and metonymically linked to these broken birds. Sallie is described, for example, as resembling a "pelican or some fat bird" when her legs are curled under the skirt of her dress (67), and her face when waking is imagined by Billy as "blind as a bird in the dark" (32). Like the owls, though, Sallie can see in the dark; Billy observes on the Chisum verandah with Angela that "tho I cant see Sallie's eyes I think she must be watching us" (68).

Sallie is further connected to her caged birds by Billy, who sees Sallie from a distance through the mediation of a window frame -- like the mediation of the "criss crossed fence" between him and the birds. The house she travels through is "stuffed with yellow wet light" -- the same yellow of the owls' eyes and of the moon, which is described elsewhere as a "frozen bird's eye" (26). Like the birds, Sallie chooses to remain in her domestic confines, despite being 'free' to escape; even in the "day time when they were let out... [they] tended to stay within the shade of their cages anyway" (36). The birds' freedom is of course limited by the desert

surrounding the ranch -- which has killed "three quarters of those that tried to cross it" (36) -- just as Sallie's freedom is limited metaphorically by the desert of opportunity around her.

In *The Collected Works*, the female is always potentially caged by the social constructs Ondaatje represents. And he accentuates that caging by ensuring that the female characters' thoughts and perspectives are always mediated, be it through Pat, Billy, or Ondaatje, who finds the reminiscences of Sallie in Walter Noble Burns' book *The Saga of Billy the Kid* and records them in his own 'collection'. This mediation is of critical importance to any examination of gender in the text. Sallie's voice and the voice of Paulita Maxwell only appear as 'quoted' from the Noble Burns text, filtered first through Noble Burns, and then through Ondaatje as narrator. Similarly, the story of Marguerita appears in the text after being taken from the comic book cited in the book's credits (3). Angela only speaks through the accounts of Billy and Pat. Whereas both Billy and Pat appear through the single filter of the narrator, then, all of the voices of female characters are mediated through a double filter: first through the male narrator, and then through a male character or reference.

In a later poem, published in *The Cinnamon Peeler*, Ondaatje seems to be trying to provide Sallie with the voice she is not given in *The Collected Works*. In "Sallie Chisum/Last Words on Billy the Kid," written from Sallie's perspective, the tone is angry and perhaps even bitter about the loss of Billy, and about what he has left behind after his death. Sallie imagines Billy -- "His body the shadow of the only tree on the property" -- as still present, yet as painfully absent from her daily activities:

Where have you been I ask
Where have you been he replies

I have been into every room about 300 times
since you were here
I have walked about 60 miles in this house
Where have you been I ask. (70)

We can hear Sallie's resentment at her confinement here, as we cannot in the text of *The Collected Works* itself. Implied also is her anger at Billy, who is able to escape through death the painful, numbing details of survival. At the end of the poem it is Sallie who has the 'last word' on Billy the Kid, smoking the cigarette that Billy has taught her to "hold" and "want," describing her vision of Billy as a 'reversible mirror' which "you can pivot round and see yourself again" (70):

I am leaning against the bed rail
I have finished my cigarette
now I cannot find the ashtray.
I put it out, squash it
against the window
where the moon is.
In his stupid eyes. (71).

The poem has the effect of demystifying the Sallie we have seen only through the 'mirrors' of Billy and Pat Garrett in *The Collected Works*. It also quite clearly addresses the absence of the unmediated female voice in *The Collected Works*, revealing the anger, loneliness, and humanity of the female that the earlier text does not portray. The poem ultimately suggests a rethinking about such absence within the text of *The Collected Works* and introduces the possibility that Ondaatje might reconsider such an absence of female perspective in future works.

According to De Lauretis, men and women live in a language that describes them, and by describing, creates them (5). Ondaatje's establishment of a double narrative filter for the female characters actually emphasizes the manner in which he and his male characters create

Angela and Sallie through their descriptions. Indeed, *The Collected Works* thematizes the act of description so overtly that Billy's angel/whore descriptions of Sallie and Angela ultimately seem like conjuring acts. Precisely because Ondaatje allows us to witness the process whereby the feminine is created along very conventional lines, he equally allows us the margin in which to critique gender codifications -- and specifically those codifications that emerge from and build on a fully recognizable mythology.[2]

In his first account of the activities within the Chisum house, which he gives when he approaches it with Angela, Billy clearly mythologizes Sallie as a kind of angel. Although he originally sees Sallie "in probably her long brown and yellow dress, the ribbon down her front to the waist with pale blue buttons, a frill on either side of her neck along her shoulders" (32), later in the same passage he refines her image: to him she looks "like a ghost across the room moving in white dresses... Yes. In white long dresses in the dark house" (33). It is as if he is here fixing the right image of Sallie into his mind, disregarding any more accurate details in favour of this angelic picture. This preferred image becomes more concrete as the text confirms and emphasizes her nightgown, which is "always yellow or white" (67). The carefully observant Pat Garrett, on the other hand, makes no mention at any time of this ghostly detail in his descriptions of Sallie. Billy also describes Sallie at one point through the haze of his drunkenness, as they wait outside the bathroom to throw up:

> At one point Angela was in the can and Sallie and I stood in the hall, leaning against the wall, eyes half closed, she in a nightgown of white with silver flowers on it and a bow of grey trailing down to her stomach. The hall also grey as nobody wants the light on...and Sallie's even put her hair over her face for more shade. And in my blur she looks lovely there, her body against the cold stone wall, leaning there, her arms folded, the wrist snuggled into her elbows and her gown down to her white feet scratching at each other. (70)

Ondaatje is drawing our attention here to Billy's view of Sallie 'through the blur' of his own

mythmaking. As Dennis Denisoff rightly points out, Ondaatje uses this sense of blurred vision in his representation of the character of Billy to indicate his own limitations as author of the tale. Denisoff observes that:

> As the author of Billy the Kid, Ondaatje initially may be perceived as the sovereign of its social network; but he is, at best, only the tenuous organizer of a mutable social state that he does not completely control and to which he does not have complete access. Ondaatje implies as much by acknowledging both his active and passive roles in the society of Billy the Kid through references to blurred vision (5, 64, 73) and limited perception (46, 68). (58)

With these astute observations in mind, then, I would suggest that Billy's mythmaking of females within the text -- his participation in their double mediation -- may well mirror Ondaatje's own reluctance to approach the female directly; and yet, as I have also pointed out, Ondaatje does offer us the critical tools with which to question the accuracy of Billy's vision.

If Sallie is angelic for Billy, then Angela Dickinson is mythologized through a sexualized language that emphasizes her role as a prostitute. Yet, she is less a fleshly woman than something strangely inhuman, or even machine-like. In the first account of their lovemaking, Billy focuses on her hair, which 'shatters' the pillow; her "tall gawky body spitting electric"; her stomach "a hollow where the bright bush jumps'; and "her body nearly breaking off my fingers" (16). She is also almost superhumanly flexible, contorting herself repeatedly in the most awkward-sounding positions: "she hooks in two and covers me / my hand locked" (16); and then later,

> showing me her thighs
> look Billy look at this
> she folded on the sheet
> tapping away at her knees
> leans back waving feet at me
> catching me like a butterfly
> in the shaved legs of her Tucson room. (25)

As Owens points out, there is a difference between Billy's first description of his encounter with Angela, and the second, which she sees as a fine-tuned version of the first, re-written by a Billy who "feels compelled to create order where he cannot find it" (125); the latter version is thus Billy's "re-working of events in a way which grants him greater control" (127). This re-working of events is, indeed, a central aspect of his mythologizing process, although Owens' emphasis on Billy's need for order may be overstated. It seems more likely that this revision of the earliest scene has more to do with gender than with order. It becomes clear that, while Angela D. is an aggressive female sexually, she is not necessarily more aggressive than Billy himself, who in the first scene bites "into her side," leaving "a string of teeth marks" (16) that are curiously reminiscent of Billy's "blood necklace" (6) at the beginning of the collection. The second poem about Angela is purged of references to Billy's own 'sexual aggressiveness' or violence, so that Angela is portrayed as the aggressor and Billy the victim.

Later in the text, we also see Billy protesting Angela's acrobatics in the Chisum bathroom -- before taking advantage of the precariousness of Angela's position:

> Youre too heavy for this I think, and we move careful to the floor, she leaning back like timber, lifts her legs to take clothes off and I grab the skirt and pull it over her head. Let me out Billy. Out Billy. Quiet she's next door. No! I know you Billy you! Youre fucking her. No Angie, no, I say, honest Angie you got too much, and enter her like a whale with a hat on, my drowning woman my lady who drowns, and take my hat off. (68)

The violence of Billy 'grabbing' the skirt and trapping Angela would seem to be a reaction, based on earlier passages, to the Angela who is described as 'catching' him 'like a butterfly' and as 'covering' him (25, 16) -- even though Billy is clearly not helpless in terms of 'defending himself'. The interaction between Billy and Angela in this bathroom scene is a continual battle of 'yes' and 'no' -- a battle of wills which Billy seems to win by rendering Angela faceless, just as

the text renders her voiceless. Angela's jealous accusation that Billy is 'fucking' Sallie is important here, because it introduces the possibility that Billy can only deal with females by constructing them in a way that suits his needs -- by mythologizing them into highly conventional types, or better, by mythologizing them piece by piece. In his "song about the lady Miss A D," for example, Billy provides a series of metaphors and similes relating to Angela's body parts: "Miss Angela D has a mouth like a bee"; "her teeth are a tunnel / her eyes need a boat / Her mouth is an outlaw...Her throat is a kitchen", and so on (64). That Billy's description again represents his limited perception and asserts his limitations as a trustworthy narrator is confirmed with his disclaimer near the beginning of the song: "Miss Angela Dickinson / blurred in the dark" (64).

Ondaatje's representation of Angela is problematic, of course, for its unwillingness to posit the whole woman. However, Ondaatje's distancing of his authorial self from the textual representation of females, and his placing of that responsibility on such unreliable narrators as Billy, serve to highlight the fact that the mythic typecasting of women is entirely Billy's. And he is, in turn, caught up in his own typecasting of western 'frontier' masculinity. Ondaatje treats these gender-inflected constructs so excessively that they ultimately serve as parodies of themselves. Angela's representation as a whore and Sallie's as an angelic saviour, thus both form part of Billy's 'masculine' mythmaking project.[3] As George Elliott Clarke argues, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* is a "story about the murderous consequences of mis-characterization and the tendency of facts to mean different -- and even dangerous -- things to different people" (5). While Clarke is discussing Ondaatje's mythologizing of Billy and Pat Garrett, that mythologizing quite clearly extends to his female characters. The 'facts' about the lives of both Sallie and Angela mean very different things to the characters in *The Collected*

Works and, since we are not privy to any confirmation or refutation of such facts from the female characters themselves, the facts -- and the characters themselves -- must remain forever 'blurred'.

~TWO~

Creating the Ideal Mirror:

Coming Through Slaughter

In *Coming Through Slaughter*, a beautifully written fictionalization of the life of jazz musician Charles 'Buddy' Bolden, Michael Ondaatje again approaches the task of representing a man's life, based partly on historical data and partly on his own imaginative creation. Within the text, Ondaatje acknowledges his fascination with the character of Bolden as stemming from a phrase read in a newspaper: "There was the sentence, 'Buddy Bolden who became a legend when he went berserk in a parade'" (134). He then goes on to acknowledge his personal identification with both the subject of the sentence and the text itself: "What was there in that, before I knew your nation your colour your age, that made me push my arm forward and spill it through the front of your mirror and clutch myself?" (134). His representation of Bolden, then, is also self-representation. Such an interplay between writer and subject, with the boundaries between them so often blurred, relegates other characters in the text to outsiders' roles, as the subject/author seeks to create himself through art, and to negotiate a safe passage through the public selves that are created and perceived in the process. Ondaatje allows the text to reveal Bolden's own creation of 'others,' of female characters that live in, and yet trespass the boundaries of their roles as wives, mothers, and prostitutes. They are primarily sexual creatures, and we are meant to view Bolden's own process of creating the women he becomes involved with as his others -- as mirrors in which to see himself reflected and expressed. As mirrors, however, they resist intrusion, interfering with any of his attempts to reach through and find himself. Gender becomes a boundary in this text, one that possesses the promise of being effaced, yet proves ultimately to be solid.

As they are in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, women in *Coming Through Slaughter* are represented through the double mediation of the author and the male character. They thus become the female 'other' to the male author, being consistently presented through the eyes of

male characters with whom the author identifies. Ondaatje explores the boundaries between characters' gendered roles by having his male protagonist probe and challenge the bounds of gendered identity between himself and the two main female characters, Nora Bass and Robin Brewitt. And Ondaatje plays with the idea of the performativity of gender, referring again to the coincidence of authorial ownership of character and male ownership of the female.[1]

Winfried Siemerling articulately outlines the process by which Ondaatje as author submerges himself in the real and fictional character of Buddy Bolden. Referring to the dolphin sonographs that open the book as a central metaphor for this process, he argues that, like the sonographs, "Ondaatje's writing projects an imperceptible simultaneity into the sequence of writing, and onto the space of a page -- the limit of the perceptual moment in which the self goes through the window of the other, breaks through the mirror-image of the self, and loses (self-) consciousness" (121). Siemerling refers here to the moments in the text in which Ondaatje's authorial persona intrudes self-consciously into the construction of Buddy Bolden, presenting itself as literally a mirror image:

> The photograph moves and becomes a mirror. When I read he stood in front of mirrors and attacked himself, there was the shock of memory. For I had done that. Stood, and with a razor-blade cut into his cheeks and forehead, shaved hair. Defiling people we did not wish to be." (133)

While Siemerling's project is to demonstrate the ways in which Ondaatje probes "the precarious balance...between the perceiving, writing subjectivity and its created other" (106), he nevertheless paves the way for an examination of Ondaatje's construction of gender, for he probes the balance between male subjectivity and its created female other.

Indeed, the evidence that Ondaatje is exploring what he perceives to be the oppositional and magnetic forces of the sexes, and the thin yet rigidly drawn lines between

them, is extensive in *Coming Through Slaughter*. It is inadequate, in other words, to view the mirror as only figuring the relationship between the authorial self and constructed other, since the mirror equally figures the relationship between the protagonist's self and the female other -- Buddy Bolden, in effect, only perceives his selfhood as it is mirrored or reflected in everyone from the 'girlfan' to Nora and Robin.

Critics like Alice Van Wart argue that Nora Bass is the "fixed point in Buddy's life," that she imposes "on him the order he lacks in his own personal life," though he "resents...this very order" because he "sees it as being antithetical to his own nature" (12). Yet Ondaatje is explicit about the fact that this resentment is directed at both himself and Nora:

> eventually he was completely governed by fears of certainty. He distrusted it in anyone but Nora for there it went to the spine, and yet he attacked it again and again in her, cruelly, hating it, the sure lanes of the probable. Breaking chairs and windows glass doors in fury at her certain answers. (15-16)

Bolden's trust in Nora's absolute certainty constitutes a reflection of her that he recognizes and needs, but also hates. He responds, then, by breaking any containing objects or surfaces nearby, as if to both insist on and efface the barriers between them.[2]

As we see in other sections of the text, Bolden clearly tends to attack the things in others that are present in him. Siemerling argues that the passage dealing with Bolden's violent fury at Tom Pickett is, for example, symptomatic of that tendency: "Bolden's cutting into Pickett's 'beautiful' face attacks not only the lover of his wife, but also Pickett's narcissism -- which mirrors Bolden's own" (119). Bolden strikes out against the reflective surfaces around him, against mirrors, windows, or faces in which he recognizes unacceptable aspects of himself. When, as Siemerling suggests, Bolden comprehends that "his cuckolding of Jaelin Brewitt inverts the situation between Nora, Pickett, and himself" (119), he equally distances himself

from that comprehension. He registers that Nora is a mirror-like force, but he quickly constructs boundaries to separate himself from such knowledge, learning "all he could" about Nora and "questioning her long into the night about her past" (15) in order to affirm the differences between them. Ultimately, however, Bolden gets "lost in the details" and can find "no exact focus towards her" (15). Because the barriers cannot be stabilized -- cannot remain in focus -- Bolden decides to "[draw] her power over himself" (15) like another skin of his own identity, attempting to assimilate Nora, as the unknown, into an aspect of himself. Ondaatje thus seems to acknowledge the inexplicable 'otherness', yet peculiar reflectiveness, of the female.

Ondaatje explicitly thematizes Bolden's efforts to simultaneously distance himself from and assimilate Nora, highlighting Bolden's preoccupations with the habits and routines of his life with her as the centre that gives "his life at this time...a fine and precise balance" (13). Life 'at this time' with Nora involves a "careful allotment of hours": Bolden works at the barbershop from mornings, after walking his children to school, until 4 p.m., sleeping at home with Nora from 4 until 8 -- "the two of them loving each other when they woke" -- and then going to play his jazz through the night at one of the local stages (12-14). As her surname suggests, she is constructed by both Ondaatje and Bolden as a part of the 'bass' line of Bolden's life -- a part of his world of certainties which he wishes, yet is unable, to reject. She is thus symbolically linked to the music of John Robichaux. Bolden "loathed everything he stood for," his domination of audiences, his placing of "emotions into patterns which a listening crowd had to follow" (93); but he admits one night that he "enjoyed listening to the clear forms," aware suddenly of a "mechanistic pleasure," "a trust" in Robichaux's measured, predictable patterns (93). With Nora, Bolden seems to possess a similar trust that she will be what he

'knows' her to be, while remaining aware that he does not want to be 'known' in that way by audiences or by Nora. Even as he contains Nora in the identity he assigns her, Bolden himself does not wish to be categorized or contained by the labels assigned to him: "barber, publisher of *The Cricket*, a cornet player, good husband and father, and an infamous man about town" (13). Instead, in his music, he seeks to be all at once: "all the possible endings at whatever point in the music that I had reached *then*" (94).

We can see that Ondaatje creates Nora's character to reflect Bolden's own perception/construction of her as his wife, according to his limited 'knowledge' of her past life and her current habits. But just as Webb is so often wrong about his assumed knowledge (mistaking, for example, the number of steps at Nora's house), so too is Bolden wrong in his assumptions about Nora. Although he thinks he 'knows' her and knows about her other lovers, it becomes clear that his supposed knowledge about this latter aspect of her life is only self-serving; he imagines her extra-marital life as only "the competition to surprise each other with lovers" (113), as only a reflection of his relationship with her. After Pickett boasts about his relationship with Nora, for example, Bolden doubts the stability of his construction of Nora: "If Nora had been with Pickett. Had really been with Pickett as he said. Had jumped off Bolden's cock and sat down half an hour later on Tom Pickett's mouth on Canal Street. Then the certainties he loathed and needed were liquid at the root" (78). He realizes here that his certainty of her necessarily mirrors her professions of having absolute certainties, her confident "certain answers" (16). Instead of remaining a steady bass, then, she suddenly becomes an analogue to the songs that Cornish wants to play as written, but which Bolden and other band members take and improvise from. Bolden's "Nora's Song" in fact testifies to his desire to create Nora as reactive to him, as purely his construction, for it is all about his sexual exploits --

his "dragging his bone over town" over and over, "and then / dragging his bone home" (17) -- and only tangentially about her reactions. He sees her almost exclusively, until the barbershop scene, in terms of himself -- as a mirror image for himself from which he divides himself, yet in which he needs to recognize himself.

In the barbershop scene, when Pickett claims that he has had an affair with Nora, Bolden realizes that Nora has always had a life of her own which he has not acknowledged: "To see her throwing bottles at Pickett in the rain to brush him away gave her a life all her own which he, Bolden, had nothing to do with. He was aware the scene on the street included a fight that did not include him" (78). Such a realization prompts Bolden to refashion Nora as the unfaithful "bitch" (79). After drinking to excess, so that "fury at everyone disintegrated into repetition and lies and fantasies," Bolden "dreamt up morning encounters between Nora and the whole band" (78), ultimately constructing new details that he can live within. He is, in effect, severing the "power" that he has drawn "over himself," or better, recognizing that her "power" is a skin that does not fit precisely because it cannot be absorbed into his own identity. At Shell Beach, he wishes to escape from everyone he has ever 'known' because he realizes that he has not known them at all, that he has known only details and second-hand accounts of lives. And this, indeed, is all we know of Bolden -- the fragmented accounts of his life that Ondaatje pieces together with fiction. Nora actually gets represented third-hand, principally through the accounts given in the text by Bolden and Webb. The introduction of the character of Robin Brewitt seems to acknowledge this layered mediation, in that she is presented as an 'other' whom Bolden believes can facilitate the disintegration of the boundaries between self and other, and, by extension, the boundaries of gender.

When Bolden meets Robin Brewitt, Ondaatje observes that he "nearly fainted" (32); he

loses control of his senses, and, perhaps in more romantic terms, his heart. The early stages of Bolden's relationship with Robin are marked clearly by an ongoing loss of control or, more accurately, by the loss of the balance that characterized his life with Nora. Robin seems to represent an alternate 'other' for Bolden -- a second chance, as it were, for his constructing a kind of truth for himself. Robin, too, functions as mirror-like for Bolden, but with her -- unlike with Nora -- Bolden furiously tries to identify the barriers between them in order to eliminate them. "Bolden lost himself then," the narrator proclaims about Bolden's arrival in Shell Beach, and his meeting of Robin Brewitt (32). He is described then as using "his cornet as jewellery" "for the first time" after Jaelin and Robin have gone to bed, following a long night of Bolden's keeping them up, talking, pretending he was hungry so as to keep them feeding him and close by (32-33). He plays "the gentlest music he knew" "for the three of them" in the cold night air, until "his body was frozen and all that was alive and warm were the few inches from where his stomach forced the air up through his chest and head into the instrument" (33).

This passage marks a literal departure for Bolden. Playing to seduce and to awe a small audience, he experiences his own body slipping away frozen beneath him. This freezing of his body is linguistically linked to other moments of freezing in the text -- those frequently established as transitions. When Bolden arrives at Nora's house, for example, he is greeted by Cornish, standing "[f]rozen" at the door, marked by the realization that Bolden is back in town, and also by the guilt that Cornish is living with Bolden's wife (108). In another instance, when Bolden has to decide whether to "step on the train or go back to the Brewitts," Ondaatje describes him as "frozen" (39) in a moment of indecision. Semiotically, both of these incidents are linked to the ice in the Joseph Shaving Parlour where Buddy supposedly worked. It was:

> the one cool place in the First and Liberty region. No one else within a mile could afford plants, wallpaper. The reason was good business. And the clue to good business, Joseph knew, was *ice*. Ice against the window so it fogged and suggested an exotic curtain against the heat of the street. The ice was placed on the wood shelf that sloped downwards towards the window at knee level. The ice changed shape all day before your eyes. (47)

Ice, here and elsewhere in the text, functions metaphorically as a barrier, a disguise, an ever-changing mask – it functions, in effect, as the mirrors do. Like Bolden's sense of certainty, and like Ondaatje's portrayal of the unreliability of mirrors, which leave too much unseen, or out of the frame, the ice is 'liquid at root' -- ultimately melting into "filmy water" collected in "waiting pails," then thrown to the plants (47).

In another early scene with Robin, freezing also figures as a symbol of a temporary stillness that prefaces change. After entering an unidentified room with Robin, Bolden relishes the slow details of their intimacy:

> the click of the door as she leans against the handle, snapping shut so we are closed in with each other. The snap of the lock is the last word we speak. Between us the air of the room. Thick with past and the ghosts of friends who are in other rooms. She will not move away from the door. I am sitting on the edge of the bed looking towards the mirror. (61)

The reference to Robin's refusal to move from the door situates her as a linking device, even though Bolden wishes to see her just in the room, as separate from those other ghost-filled rooms. The sound of the "snap of the lock" prefigures the later "liquid snap" of orgasm: "Breathing towards the final liquid of the body, the liquid snap, till we slow and slow and freeze in this corner. As if this is the last entrance of air into the room that was a vacuum that is now empty of the other histories" (61-62). It becomes clear as the text progresses that this frozen moment is indeed another temporary certainty, like the closed door, for when Webb arrives "with all his stories about me and Nora, about Gravier and Phillip Street, the wall of

wire barrier glass went up between me and Robin" (86). The ghosts, here, have entered the room.

Bolden maintains, later in the passage, however, that this "white room" with Robin possesses "no history and no parading" (86). It is a place where he "can make something unknown in the shape of this room. Where I am the King of Corners" (86). He insists that it was "Robin who drained my body of its fame when I wanted to find that fear of certainties I had when I first began to play, back when I was unaware that reputation made the room narrower and narrower, till you were crawling on your own back, full of your own echoes, till you were drinking in only your own recycled air" (86). The white room, like the ice and barrier glass, offers what Bolden perceives as a fixed point -- as a frozen moment that is almost nostalgic before anything actually happens. On their last night together, Bolden and Robin "tear into each other, as if to wound, as if to find the key to everything before morning. The heat incredible, we go out and buy a bag of ice, crack it small in our mouths and spit it onto each other's bodies" (86-87). Bolden realizes, however, that there will be no key to understanding -- that this frozen moment will dissolve

> [l]ike the ice melting in the heat of us. Dripping wet on our chest and breasts we approach each other private and selfish and cold in the September heatwave. We give each other a performance, the wound of ice. We imagine audiences and the audiences are each other again and again in the future...We follow each other into the future, as if now, at the last moment we try to memorize the face a movement we will never want to forget. As if everything in the world is the history of ice. (87)

Bolden's recognition of audiences and performances gestures back to "Nora's Song," in which he posits Nora's reaction to his sexual exploits; and thus the moment is doubly frozen because it has already been pre-performed, despite his attempts at improvisation.

Although Bolden tries to enclose his relationship with Robin in a static 'white room'

that shuts out the past, he gradually recognizes that life continues outside the frozen frame -- he recognizes what Robin has known from the start. If Bolden has been unwilling to acknowledge reality, Robin has insisted on it continually. He wants to efface the barriers between them, while maintaining the barriers between them and the outside world, but Robin never allows herself -- or Bolden -- to forget that all of those barriers exist. Bolden, for example, attempts to assert that nothing has changed for himself, Robin and Jaelin, after his affair with Robin has begun (58), even though his actions clearly indicate that much has changed. The scene in which Bolden throws a jug of milk at Robin in response to her playful flick of cream on his face serves as yet another 'frozen' transitional moment, as Bolden illustrates his unacknowledged anger at the painful situation he has found himself enmeshed in, leaving Robin "frozen in a hunch she took on as she saw the milk coming at her. Milk all over her soft lost beautiful brown face" (68). In refusing to acknowledge that anything has altered between them here, Bolden walks out of the room, leaving Robin to deal with the consequences of his possessiveness, and later urging her to "try and forget it" (68). With Robin's refusal, Ondaatje highlights Bolden's recurring fury at containing devices:

> No I won't forget it, Buddy, but I know you're sorry.
> Well it's just as well it happened.
> Yeah, you'll be better for a few days. But which window are you going to break next, which chair. (68-69)

Bolden goes on to ask for silence from her, in an attempt to deny the constraining walls, but Robin insists that he accept the reality of the situation:

> Don't talk Robin.
> You expect to come back and for me to say nothing? With Jaelin here?
> Look you're either Jaelin's wife or my wife.
> I'm Jaelin's wife and I'm in love with you, there's nothing simple.
> Well it should be.

Bolden's frame contains only the simple world of "should be" -- a world in which he can dissolve the barriers between himself and Robin and keep them distinct from his former life. His anger and despair surface in moments when he glimpses the possibility that such barriers cannot be effaced without unbearable consequence, or, perhaps more to the point, when he registers that Robin's query as to which window and which chair he is "going to break next" points to his reenactment of his life with Nora. The women in Buddy Bolden's life operate as his constructed reflections of himself, of what he wants to be. But Ondaatje comments throughout *Coming Through Slaughter* on Bolden's inability to stabilize these reflections, his inability to keep them constrained within the frame of the mirror or of the photograph.

References to Bellocq's work with photography shed much light on Ondaatje's representation of women within the text. Bellocq has, for example, photographs of Nora taken "before she and Buddy were married" (53), photographs that Bolden may not have seen and that therefore lie outside the frame of his experience. They are also outside the frame of our experience as readers, since only one of Bellocq's photos of Nora is described -- the one that presents Nora's "serious face" when she was "five years younger" than at her wedding (53). Bellocq's subsequent destruction of this photograph is significant, in that even this alternate view of Nora is destroyed, so that we as readers do not have the opportunity of interpreting Nora's image in any way other than the way that Bolden represents her. Bellocq does not want any more "questions" asked by a probing investigator. And, by extension, Ondaatje insists that the critical reader not probe beyond Bolden's representation -- or perhaps that the reader question where the difficulties are with any such probing.

Bellocq's photographs of the Storyville prostitutes, on the other hand, do exist still, so that the inquisitive reader may look to the physical 'evidence' for an alternative perspective of

Ondaatje's photographic descriptions. Significantly, Ondaatje's descriptions deal chiefly with what is outside the frame of the photograph. In fact, he invites the reader to "[l]ook at the pictures. Imagine the mis-shapen man who moved round the room, his grace as he swivelled round his tripod, the casual shot of the dresser that holds the photograph of the whore's baby that she gave away" (54). This photograph within the photograph, this imaginative recreation of the scene and its backdrop, and this invocation of all that is present but not visible, all replicate Ondaatje's narrative technique in *Coming Through Slaughter.* And it is therefore no surprise that Ondaatje's interest in Bellocq focuses on his intentions and his artistry; Bellocq's photographs say more about himself than his subjects, for they point to the author's repeated emphasis on the possible realities that exist outside the reality that he is creating. With Bellocq's photos, Bolden's frozen moments, and, to a point, Ondaatje's fictional representations, there is always a gendered something that escapes the frame:

> What you see in his pictures is her mind jumping that far back to when she would dare to imagine the future, parading with love or money on a beautiful anonymous cloth arm. Remembering all that as she is photographed by the cripple who is hardly taller than his camera stand. Then he paid her, packed, and she had lost her grace. The picture is just a figure against a wall. (54)

The woman's thoughts, dreams, and physical grace can be captured temporarily, but to capture them is only, finally, to produce a "figure against a wall." Yet, as Ondaatje suggests, that wall is not permanent.

Like so many 'containing devices' in this text, photographs are repeatedly subject to destruction, and the very ephemeral quality of the thing that is supposed to capture and freeze the moment accentuates the text's emphasis on the fragility of constructed boundaries. Bellocq destroys the negatives of Bolden's band and of Nora after Webb comes searching, because he wants "[n]o more questions" (53). Weeping while he does it, he also burns his photographs of

the "gypsy feet" prostitutes -- women with "[t]highs swollen and hair fallen out and eyelids stiff and sad and those who had clawed through to the bones on their hips" (119). Bellocq equally mutilates other photographs of the prostitutes:

> Some of the pictures have knife slashes across the bodies. along the ribs. Some of them neatly decapitate the head of the naked body with scratches. These exist alongside the genuine scars mentioned before, the appendix scar and others non-surgical. They reflect each other, the eye moves back and forth. The cuts add a three-dimensional quality to each work. (55)

Bellocq's damaging of the pictures replicates Bolden's self-mutilation when he "stood in front of mirrors and attacked himself," just as it reproduces Ondaatje's own: "For I had done that. Stood, and with a razorblade cut into cheeks and forehead, shaved hair. Defiling people we did not wish to be" (133). Precisely because such mutilation is an extension of the smashing of windows, mirrors and chairs -- because it involves the smashing of containing boundaries -- it is irrevocably linked to gender in this novel, for gender barriers pose, paradoxically, the most concrete yet least stable boundaries in the text. And the male impulse to self-disfiguring is thus connected to the men's complicity in the disfiguring of the women -- the "figures against the wall."

Ondaatje's description of the "gypsy feet" prostitutes, as "so ruined they use the cock in them as a scratcher" (118), does more than simply draw attention to the grim racial and social backdrop of Storyville. As Lorraine York points out rightly, Ondaatje offers in his early description of these prostitutes "a straightforward recognition and critique of the commodification of women's bodies" (81). Within the text, however, York observes that we also see "the complicity of the poet with the buyer and user of women" in terms of Bolden's role. Bolden, she argues, is implicated in Bellocq's "project of photographing the prostitutes in that he convinces some of the women to pose," thereby enacting a model of the "artist as complicit commodifier of the female" (81). And indeed, throughout the text, Buddy Bolden

constructs women in his chosen image. Nora, like Comish, is made to serve as the "overlooked metronome" to his life (112), and Robin is made into the cloud in the white room, supplying the shelter that she can not in reality provide. But Ondaatje does not, ultimately, appear to endorse this commodification, or at least, he represents himself as well aware of its limitations. As in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, women in *Coming Through Slaughter* are constructed as contained, whether by role, as in the case of the Storyville prostitutes and of Nora as whore and wife, or by physical or imaginative 'framing', as in the case of Robin. They are contained by the images of them that are created by men. However, Ondaatje clearly emphasizes the gaps in such constructions by pointing to the fragility of the constructed boundaries that frame them.

If Van Wart argues that Ondaatje represents the women in the text as shelters for Bolden, she also points out that such shelters are destructible:

> The women exercise a force over Buddy until the final crisis when he passes beyond the shelters offered by either Nora or Robin. In the final parade, he is provoked by a girl fan in the audience who is compositely identified as 'Robin, Nora, Crawley's girl's tongue'. (12)

During that final parade, Bolden's modes of containment disintegrate, so that the shelters and truths that he has built to react against -- namely the women -- become indistinguishable from one another. The scene thus becomes the culmination of a gradual process of disintegration. After leaving the Brewitt house, for example, Bolden recognizes that Robin has "become anonymous as cloud...Till she has begun to blur into Nora and everybody else" (100). Even walls as containers become more and more unreliable -- Webb and Bolden are able to "hear Robin through the wall in the kitchen" (83). And closed doors and windows, too, are opened and broken in culminating moments throughout the text.

During the final parade, it is no coincidence that Bolden finds his ideal audience in an

anonymous 'girl fan', who is "tough and young and come from god knows where. Never seen her before but testing me taunting me to make it past her, old hero, old ego tested against one as cold and pure as himself" (130). He knows no details of this girl's life, as he does Nora's. Also unlike Nora, who "had never been a shadow" (110), and who refuses to track him down after he goes missing, this girl is his "angry shadow" "who can throw [him] in the direction and the speed she wishes" (130). Unlike Robin, on the other hand, she offers silence; she can and is willing to belong to him for this moment, abandoning her male companion to follow Bolden alone. She thus becomes his ideal mirror: "God this is what I wanted to play for, if no one else I always guessed there would be this, this mirror somewhere" (130). After meeting and playing to his ideal mirror, he becomes frozen there, his friend Cornish having to finally lift "the metal from the hard kiss of his mouth" (131). Siemerling views this passage as "a study of an increasing mirroring of the self in the other to the point of its limit in identity" (128), maintaining that here we see the "breakdown of the boundary between the musician's improvising voice and the pattern against which it finds its definition" (129). But it is important to insist that the pattern is a *girl* fan -- the perfect, anonymous female mirror in which his "old ego" can be reflected in precisely the way he desires it to be.

What Bolden desires here, after having been for so long "[l]ocked inside the frame, boiled down in love and anger into dynamo that cannot move except on itself" (112), is simply a way out. The girl fan, then, is the "tin-bladed fan" at the barbershop, "turning like a giant knife all day above [Bolden's] head. So you can never relax and stretch up" (47). She is the "one window with teeth in it" (156) that he wouldn't let himself trespass with Nora -- stopping his hand before it crashed through -- and that Robin, with her insistence on borders, would not allow him to pass through. Following, and playing for the girl fan thus amounts to

> Bolden's hand going up into the air
> in agony.
> His brain driving it up into the
> path of the circling fan (136) --

a movement which "happens forever and ever in his memory" (136). Like the Storyville prostitutes, with whom Bolden is compared throughout the text, Bolden's brain "has a mattress strapped to its back" (119), the tool of his musical fame becoming the instrument that destroys all he is and has been. In misogynistic sexual language, Bolden musically attacks "the bitch" who he can at last penetrate publicly, as if striking out against all women, as he lets the "last long squawk...cough and climb to spear her all those watching like a javelin through the brain and down into the stomach" (131). His metaphoric entrance into her is finally, however, a shattering of the illusion of any true unity, for when the javelin hits, it is he who can "feel the blood that is real...flooding past [his] heart in a mad parade" (131). This, we are told, is "what [he] wanted" (131): to capture, however briefly, and however inadequately, all he has wished to be in his own created image of the other, and then to smash it, transforming the mirror to the "one window with teeth in it" which he can pass through into his own oblivion.

While Bolden may triumph in his discovery of the ultimate "girl" fan -- and again I would argue that Ondaatje is deliberate in his emphasis of *girl* as opposed to woman or female -- Ondaatje seems to question that triumph, suggesting that Bolden's perfect mirror, like the other female figures in the text, is only framed temporarily and is always already escaping constraint. The entire idea of "certainty" as doomed to be proven unstable does, after all, underpin the text as a whole. Bolden's certainty at the parade, then, with regard to the female as mirror, may well prove to be "liquid at the root." But we should also recall that Ondaatje walks a fine line here, precisely because he has chosen to implicate himself authorially in Bolden's

artistry. As Naomi Jacobs points out, Ondaatje has claimed the "freedom to create a Bolden out of 'personal pieces of friends and fathers' and of himself" (10). Much as he might question Bolden's discovery of the perfect mirror, then, Ondaatje ends up participating in the very establishment of those mirrors, at once pointing to their instability and metaphorically throwing up his hands at the prospect of representing what escapes the frame -- metaphorically or even metafictionally insisting on his inability to render a female subjectivity that is not subject to masculine creation. Indeed, Bolden's final, violent gesture towards the young unknown female subject, as motivated by Bolden's despair, may suggest that Ondaatje sees the artist as somewhat culpable in terms of the irresponsible masculine construction of the female. As with *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, *Coming Through Slaughter* gestures to something other than a female "figure against a wall," but Ondaatje nevertheless posits an authorial selfhood patently incapable of ever fully representing it.

~THREE~

Half-Revealed Creatures in

In The Skin Of A Lion

In *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje sets out to examine and challenge a series of binary oppositions. Exploring the telling of history as the novel's thematic focus, Ondaatje clearly privileges the marginal perspectives of figures who have been excluded from represented history. With his emphasis on such marginal perspectives, including those of women, he thus concerns himself with his own representations of women, attempting far more explicitly than in previous texts to give the female a voice. In analogical terms, the female is to male in this novel what unrepresented history is to represented history, what oral storytelling is to written, and what community is to isolation. The lines of demarcation between the binaries are challenged and questioned, so that the more conventional modes of relating history -- written, male-focused accounts concerned with the individual rather than the community -- appear wholly inadequate in terms of telling the 'full story.' We might well expect, in terms of such analogies at any rate, that the female would be a primary focus of this story. But instead -- even though her representation is more comprehensive than in Ondaatje's previous works -- she continues to remain marginalized in the text. The story that is told in *In the Skin of a Lion* is mainly related through the eyes of Patrick Lewis, who, like Billy and Buddy, offers only the masculine perspective of the female characters. While Ondaatje attempts to challenge and even to eliminate the boundaries of gender that exist between Patrick and the female characters, the female -- although posited as central to the novel's plot, and as a unifying principle for a fragmented masculine selfhood -- yet remains the outsider to the masculine narrative.

In many respects Ondaatje seems caught within the sort of codifications of gender outlined by Emmanuel Levinas. For Levinas, the masculine is associated with a questing, conquering spirit, and the feminine with interiority; the female provides the 'interior' space for

his ethical thought and action: "The woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the Home and habitation...the Other whose presence is discreetly an absence...is the Woman" (155). She is, then, a unifying principal for the male, who could not negotiate the 'interiority' of ethical behaviour without her participation. She is also, however, the outsider to the action, as it were, being necessary, but marginal to the importance of the masculine project. The female in *In the Skin of a Lion* takes on just such a role. She is necessary for the telling of the 'untold' stories of Toronto's history, but nonetheless, *this* story belongs to Patrick. Patrick is the 'hero' of this mythical tale, which is set up as a parallel to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. In De Lauretis' words, there are two basic characters that appear in any "mythical text:" "the hero and the obstacle or boundary" (43). The

> hero must be male regardless of the gender of the character, because the obstacle, whatever its personification...is morphologically female -- and, indeed, simply the womb, the earth, the space of his movement. As he crosses the boundary and "penetrates" the other space, the mythical subject is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death, she (it) is an element of plotspace, a topos, a resistance, matrix, and matter. (43-44)

Ondaatje's questing hero, Patrick Lewis is indeed male and, although he is shown ultimately to champion the values and ideals of 'the other,' he nevertheless defines and challenges differences and boundaries. Through his depiction of Patrick, Ondaatje attempts to question and critique the virtues of the typical male hero and to animate his female characters so that they are not merely obstacles or props to Patrick's journey. In the end, this challenge to conventional modes of division or demarcation cannot, however, entirely eliminate conventional patterns. As Linda Hutcheon observes of postmodernism generally, it "manipulates, but does not transform signification" (*Politics* 168).

In both *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje chooses marginalized 'heros' as his protagonists: Billy is the sensitive outlaw figure, and Buddy Bolden, the figure on the margins of recorded history. Despite their marginalized conditions, however, both have been perceived as traditional examples of the romantic male anti-hero. As Christian Bok puts it, Billy and Buddy "exemplify the socially irresponsible hero: both characters act out the romantic myth of the isolated, male artist unable to function within society, in part because of his anarchic sensitivity" (114). In effect, both characters may be seen as positioning themselves in the margins of society and history. They are both, however, constructed as the hero, or as Levinas's "self-sufficient" masculine spirit, who needs the female as other to define himself (Chalier, 128). In *In the Skin of a Lion,* with a definite shift in perspective regarding what constitutes a marginalized position, Ondaatje addresses the social forces that marginalize an individual, rather than focusing on the individual nature that cannot -- or will not -- fit into society. In doing so, Ondaatje creates an alliance between Patrick as a socially marginalized figure and the female, who has been marginalized by conventional heroic histories. The self-sufficient, conquering hero is thus challenged, by means of this alliance, in that the male can no longer occupy the only marginalized role.

Ondaatje verifies this shift in perspective in an interview, recalling that his research for the novel required

> an enormous amount of reading -- about the Bloor Street Viaduct for example...And I can tell you exactly how many buckets of sand were used, because this is Toronto history, but the people who actually built the goddamn bridge were unspoken of. They're unhistorical! To write Billy, on the other hand, I had to remove any kind of social conscience, because everything was seen from his point of view. And, in a way, *Slaughter* was like that too. (Turner, 21)

By identifying *The Collected Works* and *Coming Through Slaughter* as texts written from one point

of view -- that of the protagonist in each -- Ondaatje reveals his discovery of the multitudes of socially, rather than psychologically, marginalized figures in history, and speaks of directing his writerly interest towards those figures who have been written out of history *by others*, rather than by themselves. This is an interesting shift indeed for the author, for this new concern directs his writing even further towards an exploration of the selective power wielded by the writers of history -- a group which, as we will also see, includes himself.

Linda Hutcheon notes that among the social groups and individuals usually written out of history (that is, those not included in the 'official' sources that tend to compose history) are women. As she observes, the "history that survives...is the official history of written documents and of photographs of the *men* deemed central to the prevailing power" (*Canadian* 94). In the context of the 'real' Toronto history that inspired *In the Skin of a Lion*, she sees, accordingly, that

> we know of the rich Ambrose Small and the powerful R.C. Harris, the city commissioner; but history has not necessarily recorded the names of the (unofficial) women of the rich (here, Clara Dickens) nor of the anonymous workers who built the structures commissioned by Harris. Class and gender relegate some to the position of outsiders, ex-centrics, a position that this novel uses as its paradoxical (and very postmodern) centre. (94)

And indeed in this novel, Ondaatje centres his possible history on those whose voices have been largely silent historically (and, in the case of women, silent within Ondaatje's own works). These textual voices, as Hutcheon astutely points out, include and even focus on those of women: Ambrose Small's mistress, Clara Dickens, a nun-turned-actress named Alice Gull, and Alice's daughter, Hana. Interestingly, Patrick Lewis meets all three women in sequence during the course of his search for the missing millionaire Ambrose Small. In this way, his search for a mysterious man who wields individual and financial power results in the discovery of a series of 'ex-centrics,' to use Linda Hutcheon's term -- socially marginal figures who transform Patrick's

solitary, individualistic life into a "part of a mural" (145).

Such 'ex-centric' figures are thus necessary for Patrick's transformation, all contributing to his progress as an individual, and all contributing to the telling of his story. In *In the Skin of a Lion*, the story itself can take shape only through the viewing and understanding of a multiplicity of perspectives, which are all essential in order to construct this version of history – a history that resonates as oral and therefore associated with the female and the unwritten. Oral tradition, indeed, provides the foundation for the novel, since the novel derives its name and much of its thematic focus from the Babylonian myth, The Epic of Gilgamesh. According to this legend, Gilgamesh, who mourns the death of his friend Enkidu, sets out to find Utnapishtim, a powerful figure who has been given the gift of everlasting life by the gods. Gilgamesh seeks to find the secret of immortality from Utnapishtim, and travels through waters of death (for Patrick these waters are Lake Ontario), and darkness in order to find it. The epic parallels Patrick's journey within the text after his friend and lover, Alice Gull, dies. Patrick ultimately journeys towards the Waterworks, built by R.C. Harris, who in the text is also granted the gift of immortality via his monuments, his power and his recorded accomplishments. As Hutcheon has pointed out, readers today know his name -- while they do not know the names of those who worked to make such accomplishments possible. Ultimately, however, neither Patrick nor Gilgamesh attains the immortality he originally sought. As Winfried Siemerling observes, "To take the skin of a lion, and accede to the language of historically recorded reality, remains a story between possibility and dream" (168), which is ultimately what this 'possible history' -- this novel -- becomes.[1]

At the beginning and at the ending of the text, we learn that this story we read is the story that Patrick tells orally to Alice's daughter, Hana. Initially, Hana "stays awake to keep him

company" during the drive to Marmora, listening to a story which could be a myth itself: "The man who is driving could say, 'In that field is a castle,' and it would be possible for her to believe him" (1). Later, however, we see that Hana has been positioned in "the driver's seat" for at least part of their journey together, and that she has been "adapting the rearview mirror to her height" (244). Literally and symbolically then, Hana moves from her initial role as audience to that of driver, both listening to, and possibly adapting the story to suit her own needs. Both Patrick and Hana are thus implicated as narrators, for it is possible that Hana, and not Patrick, is telling us this story at a later date. Although the dominant perspective in the novel is Patrick's, he is not necessarily the narrator.[2] And ultimately, it is Hana who is given the lion's skin, in oral matriarchal tradition, to shape this story for the reader.

The oral nature of the story thus appears to take a privileged position over the written histories that dominate Patrick's and the other characters' lives. So, too, does a sense of community – which, like orality, is gendered -- take a privileged position over isolation in the novel. The story of what Patrick learns and gains from his journey would simply not be possible without the perspectives that Patrick absorbs from Alice, Clara, and Hana. Strikingly, Thomas Van Nortwick tells us that the main lesson of the Gilgamesh epic can be found in its emphasis on community, and on the relinquishing of individual control in favour of the 'larger whole'. He observes that the epic "suggests that Gilgamesh must learn to see himself not as preeminent among men, but as part of a larger whole, ruled by forces often beyond his ability to control. Rather than challenging his limitations, he must learn to accept them and live within them: maturity requires humility, which requires acceptance, not defiance, not denial" (37). This 'lesson' corresponds precisely to critical analyses of the main thematic 'lesson' in *In the Skin of a Lion*. Gordon Gamlin, for example, observes that unlike the "heroic individual at the

centre of conventional historiography whose actions are said to be felt by generations to come, Patrick is part of a human web and...is influenced by others as much as he influences them" (75). Siemerling, similarly, observes that "the searcher Patrick, who has set out to find the disappeared, wealthy Ambrose Small, ends up finding the perspectives of 'ex-centrics'...that history has neglected: besides the story of Nicholas Temelcoff, those of ethnic minority immigrants, and those of women" (169). He writes later that the novel "shifts its emphasis from the many worlds of one individual...to a sense of whole 'invisible cities,' or communities...While Patrick recognizes his plight in the 'mirror' of the immigrants who are his neighbours, he becomes eventually a part of the picture -- rather than 'facing' it individually" (171).

In this text, Ondaatje appears to criticize his own authorial penchant for examining all angles of the silent heroic male figure without, frequently, examining the limitations of that figure. If we examine such characters as Hazen Lewis, Nicholas Temelcoff, Caravaggio, the thief, and Patrick Lewis himself, it becomes clear that Ondaatje is providing the reader with a critique of the traditional male protagonist who is silent, aloof, and a loner figure, engaged in action and the consequences of that action. Through the character of Patrick, and through the strong female characters in the text who are shown to influence Patrick, Ondaatje emphasizes that Patrick ultimately rejects the models of the removed male hero in favour of community. Karen Overbye argues lucidly that many of the male models in *In the Skin of a Lion* act principally as "masculine stereotypes." By turning away from their examples of behaviour, Patrick seems to reject traditional masculinity in favour of a more conventionally female model that is associated with community and oral, or unwritten, histories.[3]

Looking at Patrick's childhood, one can see that Hazen Lewis, Patrick's father,

provides the young child's dominant model for behaviour. There is no maternal presence mentioned in the text, and in fact, no female influence referred to at all during Patrick's formative years. Instead, Hazen Lewis is presented as a strong, independent presence, a man who chooses -- somewhat like Billy the Kid and Buddy Bolden -- to remove himself from his community. Patrick is described as being "born into a region which did not appear on a map until 1910, though his family had worked there for twenty years" (10), a description that emphasizes Hazen's decision to live in an isolated place outside the boundaries of naming – a place similar to that occupied by the immigrant labourers in the text who, in being given English names instead of their own real names, are also outside the boundaries of naming.[4] Hazen Lewis also isolates himself through silence: in "all his life the longest speech was the one made to the Rathbun staff when he told them what he could do" (16). And, as Hutcheon points out, Hazen's occupation as a dynamiter also causes him to become isolated, and self-sufficient, "an outsider even within his profession of logging" (*Canadian* 94).

It is clear that, as a masculine role model, Hazen lacks the qualities of comfort and affection which are throughout the book -- and conventionally -- associated with women. He is simply a man "withdrawn from the world around him, uninterested in the habits of civilization outside his own focus" (15). While both Alice and Clara are represented as affectionate and able to comfort Patrick in times of deep distress, Hazen is not only incapable but also unwilling, and possibly unaware of Patrick's need for comfort. Even after what appears to be a strong father-son bonding experience, when Hazen and Patrick rescue the nearly drowned cow from the river, the father and his son sleep together only for warmth, not because they feel any companionship or affection. The narrator describes the scene with restrained sympathy for Patrick: "In bed later on, they do not acknowledge each other apart from sharing the warmth

under the blanket. His father lies so still Patrick doesn't know if he is asleep or awake. The boy looks towards the kitchen and its dying fire" (14).[5] The narrator tells us that "Hazen Lewis did not teach his son anything, no legend, no base of theory", that instead the boy simply learned the art of explosives by watching (18). But Ondaatje seems to tell us that Patrick also learned from Hazen Lewis 'how to be a man' – learned the limiting, self-destructive lessons that Alice and Clara have to attempt to un-teach later.

Bok argues that Hazen Lewis is the only figure in the text to provide the familiar Ondaatje-esque model of "creative self-destructiveness" (15), although Overbye points to Nicholas Temelcoff and Caravaggio as also possessing qualities familiar to such a model. For the latter critic, Temelcoff's saving of the fallen nun "resembles the action of a superhero" (3), and Caravaggio's "aware[ness] of his body as sexual" (5) suits the model's physicality and sexuality. Both men are, however, like Patrick, 'saved by women' at some point in the text, which would seem to counter Overbye's perception of the male heroism in the text with a kind of female heroism as perceived by Ondaatje himself. Alice, for example, "save[s]" Nicholas "from falling back into space" after reaching the catwalk, after the initial fall (33). Gianetta, Caravaggio's future wife, literally 'saves' the thief from being discovered by authorities after he is injured during a theft (193-196), just as Anne houses him and does not report him to authorities later (200-203). And Patrick, I would argue, is saved by both Clara and Alice, as they lure him out of a solitary life. While masculine 'hero' types do appear in the text, Ondaatje contrasts them with female 'saviours,' upsetting conventional models of masculinity with a protagonist who rejects them in favour of 'feminine' values. Such values, however, remain supplementary to a masculine discourse, in which the feminine becomes absorbed into Patrick's masculine selfhood.

Patrick has been raised on stories celebrating masculine heroism: stories in which men save their ladies from harm, in which "women were rescued from runaway horses, from frozen pond accidents" (61), and in which "the heroes carry the women across British Columbian streams" (160). Patrick quickly learns, however, that such romantic notions of heroism do not apply when real women are involved. When, for example, Clara 'catches' Patrick standing and watching her – romantically framing her as "the rare lover" and "perfect woman" – she asks him to leave (61). The passage reveals a dawning consciousness in Patrick Lewis that it is not he, but Clara who is in control of the moment, who asks him to leave when he (and Ondaatje as writer) levels his gaze at her. Repeatedly in the text, Patrick recognizes his 'heroic male qualities' as sorely lacking. As he watches a group of men, later discovered to be Finns, skating at night with lit cattails as light, he perceives the romantic, heroic movements of the skaters: "The hard ice was so certain, they could leap into the air and crash down and it would hold them. Their lanterns replaced with new rushes which let them go further past boundaries, speed! romance! one man waltzing with his fire" (22). Patrick, however, "has always been alien, the third person in the picture" (156), and feels incapable of joining the men on the frozen river he knows so well. He considers himself unable to hurl himself beyond the boundaries of his normal life towards this life outside his experience, where something as familiar to him as this river can be trusted as a site of exuberant romance. The narrator tells us later that Patrick "was a watcher, a corrector" and that he "could no more have skated along the darkness of a river than been the hero of one of these stories" (157).

It is not, then, until he meets Clara and then Alice that he begins to feel capable of belonging in a community, of asserting his individuality in the context of others. Again, he requires the feminine principal to supplement his sense of selfhood. Referring to the incident

when Clara and Alice, assuming Patrick to be asleep, complete their spirit paintings of him, Ondaatje insists that Patrick "feels more community remembering this than anything in his life" (79). Later on, as Bok comments, Patrick cultivates a "deliberate aphasia" (119) when he is immersed in the Macedonian community, in that he allows the boundaries of language to rule him, to direct him in his solitude. In both situations in the text, Ondaatje refers to the boundary of language. With the Finns, Patrick "he did not trust either himself or these strangers of another language enough to be able to step forward and join them" (22). In both situations, he shuts himself out, and it is not until he makes the attempt to leap across the boundaries of language -- and of gender -- that he feels a sense of community, and, by extension, a sense of himself as 'belonging.'

In spite of the text's adherence to promoting values of community over those of isolation, however, there remains a strong sense of the boundaries existing around individuals. And, although Patrick attempts to transcend these boundaries, they do remain -- particularly with respect to gender. As in previous texts, Ondaatje makes the effort to self-consciously detail the limitations of the male representation of women, having Patrick, like Billy and Bolden, construct women in images suitable to him. The waitress Patrick sees in the Thompson Grill, for example, is created imaginatively by Patrick as a mythical being: he is determined to see only what he chooses to see, and to create the rest. He "came to believe she had the powers of a goddess who could condemn or bless. She would be able to transform the one she touched, the one she gripped at the wrist with her tough hand, the muscles stiffening up towards the blue-back of the half-revealed creature that pivoted on the bone of her shoulder. His eyes wanted to glimpse nothing else" (112). The "half-revealed creature" here is a tattoo glimpsed by Patrick "through a tear in the seam" of the unnamed waitress's shirt – a

tattoo that gestures to the partially-known and partially-unknown image that symbolizes Patrick's construction of the waitress as his own mythical, solitary being (112). He does not wish to see it wholly, for seeing it wholly, or knowing any further details about her life would shatter his own constructed myth and his own self-imposed solitude. This is why he does not attempt to know her, to seek out her name or story any further -- just as, when a dyer, he keeps his own "true name and voice from the bosses, never spoke to them or answered them" and chooses to know "nothing about the men around him except how they moved and laughed -- on this side of language" (136). It is precisely this attempt to see things partially -- to focus on the solitary individual rather than on the collective experiences and people which form a person -- that colours Patrick's perception and the general construction of women throughout the text.

Through Patrick's penchant for mythologizing the unknown, particularly regarding women, it becomes clear that Ondaatje as author is exploring the process of his own literary construction of women. He has Patrick time and time again in the text challenge his mythical rendering of a person with his learned knowledge of that person. Before he first meets Clara Dickens, for example, Patrick hears only grand descriptions of her: as Small's lover she has been described as the "rare lover" and the "perfect woman" (60). When he does finally meet her, however, he begins to realize the limitations of such labels, and the limitations that are implicit in any description of a person. Immediately, he wishes to know more: "what else was she," he asks, "apart from being the lover of Ambrose Small?" (61), for until this point, he had seen her only in the context afforded by others' descriptions. He originally sees her only as connected to his search, as a means to find Ambrose -- somewhat like Hazen Lewis' horses -- more as a tool for a purpose than as flesh and blood. As Clara observes to Patrick, "You think

I am the line to him, don't you? You think that he must have left his shadow on me" (62). Seen in the context of Ondaatje's other works, in which women are only presented as the means for the reader to discover more about the male protagonists, such a statement delivered by a female character has the impact of critiquing previous texts in which the female is only seen in relation to the male. To support this perspective, we see Patrick describing Clara, in his own language, as looking "like a damsel fly, the sequins and gauze up to her neck" (61), a description which again disrupts the romance of idealized description with a reference to an untranslatable reality. Damsel flies in Patrick's childhood were silent insects needing "something to translate their breath" -- insects which the young Patrick describes as perhaps "not mute at all," wondering if instead "it is just a lack of range in his [own] hearing" (10). The passage again emphasizes Patrick's -- and perhaps Ondaatje's -- limitations in terms of possessing the ability and the language to 'translate' the female character completely.

An attempt is made, via Patrick again, to explore the effectiveness of accumulating information about an individual, so as to describe her more accurately. After his initial meeting with Clara, seeing her in the shadow of Ambrose Small, Patrick soon finds himself absorbed in her details, independent of his search:

> He loved the eroticism of her history, the knowledge of where she sat in schoolrooms, her favourite brand of pencil at the age of nine. Details flooded his heart...During these days he found he had become interested only in her, her childhood, her radio work, this landscape in which she had grown up. He no longer wanted Small, he wanted to exorcise Small from Clara's mind. (69)

He is frustrated, however, by this focus on detail, for he cannot find enough to create the whole -- just as Bolden, in his quest to 'learn all about' Nora, finds only frustration and despair. Patrick "feels he knows nothing of most of Clara's life," in spite of her frank, personal oral histories and his own efforts to look at her as closely as possible. He might bring his "pillow as

close as he could for comfortable focus and gaze[ ] at her" (64), but he "keeps finding and losing parts of her, as if opening a drawer to discover another mask" (79).

With Alice Gull, similarly, Patrick is shown to feel frustrated by her seeming unwillingness to reveal her history. With her, too, he looks for details to make her concrete. While cleaning her face of makeup, for example, he examines her closely "so that it was not Alice Gull but something more intimate -- an eye muscle having to trust a fingertip to remove that quarter-inch of bright yellow around her sight" (121). Even with such intimacy, however, he is described as continually feeling she is someone he cannot know: "he can never conceive how she leaps from her true self to her other true self. It is a flight he knows nothing about. He cannot put the two people together." (153). In their lovemaking, he expects "metamorphosis as they kiss. Annunciation. The eye would go first, and as he draws back he will be in another country, another century, his arms around a stranger" (153); the passage describes the futility of intense, localized examination when there are parts of this person he will never fully know.

These examples of Patrick's frustrated searching are drawn together in Patrick's recollection of the "lost eyes" of the girl he approached on a dance floor when he was eighteen. Patrick describes his seeing of "something there he would never fully reach -- the way Clara dissolved and suddenly disappeared from him, or the way Alice came to him it seemed in a series of masks or painted faces, both of these women like the sea through a foreground of men" (128). The passage provides a glimpse into the personal lessons being learned by Patrick -- namely that one can never fully know another through details and labels. But it also functions as a metafictional commentary in which Ondaatje comments on his own female constructions in the text, his presenting of women predominantly 'through a foreground of men' as the sea, or unifying matter. Here it becomes clear that, while the women can provide a

more fully realized male self (in Patrick), it is only through men, and a masculine discourse, that the women can be seen at all.

Alice Gull is the first woman introduced in the text, and she is introduced through the male character Nicholas Temelcoff. Though she becomes an important part of his story, the reader is not permitted to know her -- is not even given her name -- until much later in the text, when Patrick discovers that this fallen nun and his lover, Alice, are one and the same. For much of the book, this fallen female exists simply as an unnamed nun, the "one with that small scar against her nose" (33), who falls with a strong gust of wind off the unfinished Prince Edward Viaduct. She is caught by the daredevil worker, Temelcoff, though she is presumed dead, since neither she nor Temelcoff ever publicly announces her survival or his heroic deed. She remains a "shape" and "new weight" held by Temelcoff, until he sees "a girl's white face;" she remaining silent and nameless throughout the ordeal although he begs her to scream, to communicate her fear, or anything (31-32). The nameless nun, however, remains silent, even after Temelcoff leads her to the Ohrida Lake Restaurant where he wishes just "to drink and talk quietly" (36). With her first textual words, instead of offering any information about herself, the woman who is to become Alice Gull (parodically named after the parrot, Alicia, in the restaurant) asks her saviour his name, although -- or perhaps *because* -- he has fallen asleep and cannot answer (39).

Alice remains reticent throughout the novel, unwilling to reveal any personal information. All that Patrick discovers about her is through his own 'searchings', for Alice "refused to speak of the past. Even her stories about Hana's father, though intricate, gave nothing away of herself. She was never self-centred in her mythologies" (137). Silence is a predominant theme throughout the novel, closely linked with blindness, and, curiously, with

light.[6] But the transformation from silence to speech, to communication, comes through linkages, through a crossing of boundaries from one individual to the next. In a culminating passage in the novel, the narrator tells us that

> Alice had once described a play to [Patrick] in which several actresses shared the role of the heroine. After half an hour the powerful matriarch removed her large coat from which animal pelts dangled and she passed it, along with her strength, to one of the minor characters. In this way even a silent daughter could put on the cloak and be able to break through her chrysalis into language. Each person had their moment when they assumed the skins of wild animals, when they took responsibility for the story. (157)

This passing along of stories occurs throughout the text. Although the male characters in the text link people and build bridges -- Nicholas "is a spinner. He links everyone" (34), and Ambrose Small, too, is "a spinner. He was bare-knuckle capitalism...and he laughed at them, spun a thread around his critics and bought them up (57) -- it is the women in the text who actually provide the forums for true exchange of experience, of the vital stories which allow individuals to become part of history.

It is Alice, for example, as the nun 'saved' by Temelcoff, who provides Patrick with her story, so that it can be passed on again to Temelcoff himself. As an immigrant who has felt outside of history all his life, he hears the story and begins to be aware of "what history means...Patrick's gift, that arrow into the past, shows him the wealth in himself, how he has been sewn into history. Now he will begin to tell stories" (149). Clara, too, is described by Gordon Gamlin as personifying "the novel's typically oral resistance to closure" as she "effaces the destructive impact of individual self-assertiveness" and "favours the anonymity oral strategies paradoxically offer by replacing individual authorship with a shared responsibility for a story" (71). She is described by Ambrose Small, for example, as possessing an "unfinished nature" (93), a nature Patrick cannot fully understand in spite of all of his searching. In a

passage describing Clara and Patrick's lovemaking, she challenges Patrick's emphasis on the boundaries between individuals and sexes, as she passes his sperm, "the white character," from her mouth to his, "back and forth between them till it no longer existed, till they didn't know who had him like a lost planet somewhere in the body" (69).

Such examples of this female exchange do not represent, like the material construction of linking devices, or like the linear progression of history, a passing down of titles or wealth or power from one to the next, but instead an oral tradition associated here with women. Storytelling, for theorist and filmmaker Trinh Minh-ha, is in other cultures a deeply valued, and specifically female tradition, which celebrates not historical fact, or what purports to be 'truth', but the power of communicating human experience: "What is transmitted from generation to generation is not only the stories, but the very power of transmission. The stories are highly inspiring, and so is she, the untiring storyteller. She, who suffocates the codes of lie and truth" (134). And within *In the Skin of a Lion*, it is ultimately this oral imperative, blended with an authorial distrust of historical truth (which is also, of course, a major theme of Ondaatje's two preceding novels), which allows the female characters to emerge as marginal figures who have been granted a recognizable and valuable language through storytelling -- through the telling of this very story.

Additionally, the 'several actresses' referred to in Alice's description of the play are clearly recognizable in the novel as Clara and Alice -- both, literally, actresses in the novel's context. Clara begins the text as the not immediately recognizable heroine. She is an actress whom Patrick seeks out in his search for Ambrose Small, specifically because she is *not* Ambrose's wife, "Theresa, the wife, the *saint*" (60). Like George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke, who is attracted to Saint Theresa's "passionate, ideal nature" (25), Clara Dickens may be seen as a

different kind of Theresa, a "foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centering in some long-recognizable deed" (26). The reference places Clara squarely in a non-historical position as one who achieves nothing deemed historically significant, but who nonetheless passes the human power of her story along to others, endorsing the communal construction of the 'alternate' histories.

After Clara disappears to be with Ambrose, her legacy is passed along to Alice, who might be seen, because of her voicelessness through much of the early text, as one of the 'silent daughters' referred to in the play. Clara's strength is clearly valued by Alice, whose "tenderest speech" to Patrick "concerned her missing of Clara. 'I love Clara,' she said to him, the lover of Clara. 'I miss her. She made me sane for all those years. That was important for what I am now' " (147). And after Alice's death, it is Patrick who picks up the story -- Patrick, a silent son, who through Alice's death and his subsequent search, finally finds his own voice. At the point that this play is described to Patrick, we also learn through his perception that "he himself was nothing but a prism that refracted their lives," the lives of "Clara and Ambrose and Alice and Temelcoff and Cato -- this cluster made up a drama without him" (157). He sees "a terrible horizon in him beyond which he couldn't leap. Something hollow, so when alone, when not aligned with another -- whether it was Ambrose or Clara or Alice -- he could hear the rattle within that suggested a space between him and community. A gap of love" (157). However, by taking up the Gilgamesh's quest and seeking immortality for Alice and the un-historical workers of the Waterworks, Patrick discovers the legacy he has inherited. Ultimately, the story ends with Hana, another silent daughter who is given the language of her complex, multilayered history by Patrick, who chooses, instead of

exploding the community that excluded him and Alice, to pass his knowledge and experience on to Hana.

Patrick's refusal to blow up the Waterworks, however, is tantamount to Ondaatje's refusal to explode the traditions which shape his text. Patrick challenges but does not 'explode' the social structures that have marginalized him, just as Ondaatje challenges, but does not ultimately dismantle the narrative structures that marginalize the female as other to the male. We see, after all, the two main female characters largely through Patrick's eyes. Indeed, Ondaatje does offer many challenges to the validity of Patrick's perceptions and comments on Patrick's -- and his own -- limitations in describing and 'knowing' each woman. Alice tells Patrick, for example, that there are things about her relationship with Clara that he will never know: "You and I will never enter certain rooms together, Patrick. A woman needs a woman to laugh with, over some things. Clara and I felt like a planet!" (164). He perceives this gap between his and their experience when Alice arrives at the farmhouse in Paris Plains. The narrator describes the "night kitchen with these two actresses" as "overwhelming" to Patrick: "Clara and Alice slip into tongues, impersonate people, and keep each other talking long into the night. Patrick is suddenly an audience" (74). Instead of Ondaatje's conventional commentary on 'the other' in terms of the male eye observing the female, he offers the women a voice to describe and to give their own perspectives on gender. At the farmhouse, the two women imitate "the way men smoke. They discuss how women laugh -- from the raucous to the sullen to the mercenary" (75). Interestingly, however, they are shown to 'imitate' men, while reserving their conversational focus for women, inscribing the binaries of male action with female passivity, or description.

The women also, of course, agree to "get" Patrick by completing their spirit paintings

of him (75). Their task, we are told, "seems as illicit" as "copying down a blueprint in a foreign country," for they believe that they are approaching "a sleeping man to see what he will reveal of himself in his portrait at this time of the night" (75). This passage is an important one in terms of Ondaatje's gender commentary in this text. Here, he attempts to allow women to draw a portrait of their own, of a figure that is only "half-revealed." Like Patrick, with the waitress's tattoo, the women must "draw upon all they know or can guess about him," given "the vagueness of his covered body" (75). The accuracy of their rendering is, however, immediately called into question. When Patrick views Clara's drawing, for example, he "does not believe her" when she says he "has come off well" (78). He does not appear to see himself in the portrait at all. In Patrick's unwillingness to acknowledge this artistic construct as an accurate representation of himself, Ondaatje allows himself a brief commentary on the possibility of authorial mis-representation, particularly in terms of gender, since he frequently calls into question his own 'artistic renderings' of the female.[7] Because Patrick *does* object to *this* portrait -- drawn by women -- Ondaatje seems to implicitly acknowledge the possibility that any female 'portrait' 'drawn' by the male writer could be equally objectionable. However, with a distinctly authorial tone, the narrator also observes that, although Patrick does not see his 'character' in Clara's portrait, "[p]erhaps the portrait will teach him" about his character and about himself (78). The passage thus concludes by dismissing the significance of anything objectionable in any 'false' portrait of women, by affirming that even a misrepresentation can be 'instructive'.

Ondaatje does present Patrick here as originally perceiving himself as once again outside the invisible boundaries of community, so that it is his own perception of the boundaries' existence that is highlighted rather than something external that inhibits his sense

of belonging. "His mind remains against them," we are told, even though he does acknowledge the sense of community he has felt with them (78-79). He is also shown later as wanting to hold Alice responsible for Clara's disappearance: "He had wanted to shake her to pieces, blame her for Clara. It seemed it was all a game of theatre the two of them had performed against him. A woman's education, removing his cleverness, even his revenge" (89). Here again Patrick sees plots and perceives gender-based boundaries that pit the female against the male. Despite his efforts in terms of narrative and characterization, then, Ondaatje does not in this text make any significant effort to reduce his insistence on the existence of gendered boundaries. One could say, in fact, that this text supports the inclination to see both male and female as equal, in terms of historical and social importance, but that it does not permit that 'equality' in any way to indicate a sameness, since the female is always outside the narrative frame. On the contrary, there is a distinction made consistently in the text between male and female characteristics and perspectives.

In one key passage, Patrick shows Clara a trick he has learned, a trick that is much like Caravaggio's trick in removing all the furniture in his room while Gianetta lies sleeping (189). Patrick's trick is to blindfold himself, ordering Clara not to move, and to whirl around the room, throwing his body near breakable windows and potentially harmful shelves. "He throws an apple into her lap, rips the date off the calendar" as he praises her beauty and pours out his longing for her: "You are so beautiful, Clara, I'll never go blind. I want to go to sleep gazing at your face each night. I couldn't be satisfied with just touching you, smelling you" (80). Unfortunately for Patrick -- and for Clara -- the narrator tells us that "[s]he refuses all of this and moves off the bed" (80). It is the movement of the woman when stillness is expected and required for the male performance. As he is "yelling his love" for her, we are told that Clara

closes her eyes, and presses hands to her head to shut out his voice. She "feels she is surrounded, contained by his whirling" (80). Finally, because of her movement, Patrick hits her, leaving her "dazed" and himself with a bloody nose (80).

Clara has refused to participate in Patrick's performance in this scene. Unlike Alice's performance in the play at the Waterworks, which requires an audience member to complete the scene and to provide the moral, this performance specifically requires Clara's non-participation. It is designed instead to celebrate Patrick's individual skill, and in effect to win her over, to persuade her not to return to Ambrose. It is also a monologue in motion requiring no oral exchange and no response. Clara will have nothing to do with such a project. She is shown to feel "contained" by the performance which is after all, a series of endearments thrown at her still figure from various corners of the room by a man who does not see her, who has looked for clues but who in the end feels he "knows nothing of most of Clara's life" (79).[8]

Patrick's act depends on where he believes Clara is positioned. This is an act that -- like an author's creation of characters -- has been perfected in isolation: "Sometimes when he is alone Patrick will blindfold himself and move around a room, slowly at first, then faster until he is immaculate and magical in it. He will parade, turn suddenly away from lampshades, duck under hanging plants, even run across the room and leap in his darkness over small tables" (79). It is a 'parading' of the sort described in *Coming Through Slaughter*: a "[p]arade of ego" (129). Like Buddy Bolden in his final parade, who, with a reference to Webb's 'trick' with magnets, expects to "aim" his music at the audience "and pull them on a string" towards himself (129), Patrick here expects Clara to respond as he desires and expects -- to remain motionless in the precise place where he has positioned her. The fact that she does not, and that she "refuses" to

conform to his expectations, seems to say two things contextually: first, that no cleverly presented words of endearment will change her firmly made-up mind, and second, that his performance, which is dependent on his directions and his instructions, does not take into consideration her will or her resolve. As Overbye argues, the passage also narratively tells us that Patrick "must realize that he cannot use his body like a machine because it does not exist in isolation" (8).

Because of Clara and her unseen motion, their 'love story' would not end like one of Patrick's romance novels, which "would conclude with all wills rectified and all romances solvent" (82). Clara, therefore, who is shown to resist being 'contained' in a conventional heroine's role, might be seen as adapting more readily to a philosophy voiced later in the text by Patrick -- although it is a philosophy he has always reserved for men. The narrator tells us that Patrick has always believed that the characters in his romance novels never "lived only on the page. They altered when the author's eye was somewhere else...Each character had his own time zone, his own lamp, otherwise they were just men from nowhere" (143). The passage speaks also for Ondaatje, who, as in previous texts, is willing to acknowledge his limited perception -- to accept that other, equally valid stories exist outside the narrative frame. But because he constructs Patrick as unable to 'see' that women may not always remain in their assigned roles, and that they might be 'altered' when the author's eye is somewhere else, we are reminded that a significant barrier remains between the male and the female within the text.

This barrier is emphasized further by Ondaatje's insistence on demarcation within the text. While painting the Kingston Penitentiary roof as blue as the sky, Caravaggio reminds Patrick that "[d]emarcation...is all we need to remember" (179). Immediately following this curious statement, we are told that "that was how he escaped" (179): he has his friends paint

him blue, so that on the roof "he was gone -- to the guards who looked up and saw nothing there" (180). Caravaggio becomes the demarcating line between roof and sky in his blue disguise, and secures his escape. The demarcating line may be invisible, but it exists. Similarly, when the author introduces the recurring image of horizons, we are made to see a limiting edge; Patrick's relationship with Alice, for example, is described as having "a horizon. She refused to speak of the past" (137). When Clara leaves Patrick, she does so at Union Station, under a sign "which said HORIZON" (209). In both instances, the word "horizon" seems to imply a limit, or an ending. However, when Ambrose Small dies, "there was no horizon" (215), only "discontinuous moments of his past" (214). Patrick, on his own release from the Kingston prison, is also portrayed as piecing together the 'discontinuous moments' of his life, "[turning] his head to the left to the right to the left, discovering the horizon" (210). He even follows Clara's advice in recalling the name of the stone behind the HORIZON sign in Union Station: "It's Missouri Zumbro. Remember that. The floors are Tennessee marble" (210). It is as if she must remind Patrick that although all may seem united, the demarcating lines persist.[9]

Ondaatje does challenge boundaries in this text by questioning the ideology behind division. To interrogate the veracity and validity of 'history', for example, he constructs a probable fictional history. To question the reality behind the boundaries between genders, he constructs differing male and female viewpoints on the matter. The boundaries are challenged, but they remain. As Hutcheon observes, postmodern fiction tends to execute this interrogation and frequent transgression of boundaries quite nicely. However, as she argues, "there is never any resolution of the ensuing contradictions. In other words, the boundaries remain, even if they are challenged" (*Politics* 72). In *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje certainly grapples with issues concerning gender, constructing female characters strong enough to challenge the male

protagonist in his textual authority, and allowing the female a voice. The voice, however, still asserts its difference, its inscrutability to the male narrator. And the author, while attempting to bridge the distance between genders, still remains mindful that he cannot count on the female to stay still while he spins the tale.

~FOUR~

Reflections of the Unknown:

Female Characters in *The English Patient*

Although *The English Patient* deals with themes and some characters distinct from those in *In the Skin of a Lion,* the later novel reinscribes such characters as Hana, Caravaggio, Patrick and Clara, who move against the temporal and emotional backdrop of the Second World War. At the beginning of the novel, Hana is no longer the sixteen-year-old teenager who takes the wheel at the close of *In the Skin of a Lion* but a young nurse of twenty who chooses to stay behind as the Allied troops withdraw from Italy. Her purpose in staying is ostensibly to care for a nameless burned man whom she initially knows only as the English patient. But she is also staying to care for herself, mending the scars of a war that has killed her 'father' Patrick – like the English patient, he was burned horrifically during the war, but unlike the English patient, died from his wounds. Caravaggio, still the thief-figure these five years following Ondaatje's previous text (in real *and* in textual time), arrives at the villa to uncover the mystery of the English patient's identity as he, too, recovers from his own wounds of war.[1] In an interview with Eleanor Wachtel, Ondaatje speaks about these characters' reemergence: "I realized I was more intimate with them than the people I had written about before, even members of my own family. This was not about someone else but rather inventions of the self, sides of the self" (257-258). By his own admission, then, these (and other new) characters act in the novel as the author's chosen representatives -- as mirrors of selfhood. Significantly, however, the mirrors are gendered -- those of male characters continue to permit the trespass of the author's reaching hand, while those of the female prohibit its full grasp.

The English Patient is, by far, Ondaatje's most gender-conscious text. As he does in *In the Skin of a Lion*, he provides the reader with two examples of a strong female presence, but in *The English Patient*, Ondaatje for the first time allows the principal female character, Hana, actions and thoughts that are independent of those of the principal male characters. In fact, Hana

articulates an implicit response to the male voice that has tended to dominate Ondaatje's previous texts, be it from a mediating narrator or from a masculine protagonist. Her voice is encoded as female, I want to argue, because it is differentiated from the male voice but not constructed as a distinct, foreign entity – a non-distinction and differentiation that suggest that Ondaatje is addressing and challenging the absence of female voices in his prior texts. While not always entirely clear and separate, Hana's narrative voice nevertheless asserts the social and personal value of female experience, broaching specifically gendered concerns as she interacts with the growing number of men in the villa and struggles to maintain her carefully constructed identity. Although the authorial motives behind this kind of presentation must be questioned in terms of context and plot development, Hana's character nevertheless emerges, overall, as a forceful presence in the novel.

If Hana preserves a certain autonomy, Katharine -- the only other principal female character in the novel -- charts the familiar ground of the traditional Ondaatje-esque woman; she is represented through the layered mediation of the author, the narrator, and the reminiscences of the English patient. Since she exists in the novel only as an absence, any voice she apparently has is necessarily suspect. The English patient, who gives his impressions of her speech and gestures, while remaining unclear (or unwilling to expostulate) on his own name and identity, exists as an untrustworthy narrator because his investment in her story precludes objectivity. Katharine thus remains a symbolic figure, manufactured by layers of male wish-fulfillment and testifying to the fruits of strictly male production.

The two principal female characters in *The English Patient* seem, then, to reflect contradictory portraits of Ondaatje's construction of women. Hana provides what may be seen as the author's conscious response to the dearth of credible, vocal female characters in his past

works, while Katharine firmly entrenches the author again in the project of prohibiting the female character from entering the text in any capacity but as the controlled property of the male. They are not, however, as different as they would at first appear; both, for example, reflect Ondaatje's familiar authorial distance from any identification with the female. The fleshed-out male characters in *The English Patient*, as in other texts, offer reflections of authorial masculinity, while the female characters are overwhelmingly 'other' — the unknown, not-entirely understood species which exists almost-centrally in the lives of male characters without the benefit of their, or the author's, complete comprehension. The woman is instead, as Irigaray states, "the other as the image of the one," merely a part of the heterosexual contract, who is never fully defined except by her opposition to the male; she is only "an image. So any move toward the other means turning back to the attraction of one's one mirage. A (scarcely) living mirror, she/it is frozen, mute" (207).

Although such critics as Geetha Ganapathy-Dore argue that Hana is the "sun around which" the male characters in the text "revolve" (96), I would suggest that the English patient constitutes the text's centre. Because Ondaatje is so conscious of forging a connection between his textual male protagonists and the writing self, his preference for masculine centres is scarcely surprising. One illustration of this preference may be seen in his focus on Almasy rather than on Katharine. Like many of his previous works, *The English Patient* relies largely on historical figures as templates for the construction of characters; with two such templates to work from, he, predictably, has chosen that of Count Laszlo Ede Almasy.

Ondaatje claims that he began writing the novel with a single image -- that of a man, falling burning from the sky[2] -- even though, as Steven Totosy de Zepetnek points out, any historical account of Almasy only details that he "is supposed to have died a few years after the

Second World War in Egypt" (145). Rather than taking from the historical Almasy the 'facts' of his life and death, then, Ondaatje seems to borrow principally from Almasy's life the template of his curious dual fascination with cartography and with aviation, since the drawing of boundaries on land and the apparent erasure of those boundaries in the sky are a major focus of the fictional Almasy's character as well as of the historical Almasy. As Totosy de Zepetnek also points out, Ondaatje's Katharine Clifton is, like Almasy, loosely based on a historical figure: that of Lady Clayton East Clayton, wife of Sir Robert Clayton East Clayton with whom Almasy explored the Libyan desert. Like Ondaatje's Katharine, Lady Clayton accompanied her husband on his expeditions. Unlike the fictional Katharine, however, she was also "a very experienced pilot" and a "talented sculptor" who, like the fictional Almasy, actually "plummeted to her death" inexplicably during a short flight (Totosy de Zepetnek, 146-147). Although Totosy de Zepetnek notes that "Ondaatje did not create [Katharine] Clifton based on her historical persona, Lady Clayton" (147), he suggests that it "would be a most rewarding exercise to analyse *The English Patient* from the point of view of feminist literary and interdisciplinary criticism" (152), because the real Lady Clayton was a more accomplished and artistically talented figure than Ondaatje's Katharine. Certainly, the historical Lady Clayton possessed a more impressive resume in terms of her accomplishments in a 'man's world' than Ondaatje's Katharine does, and she appears to have lived a fascinating life independently of either Almasy's or her husband's stories.[3] The differences between the two are indeed intriguing and have a great deal to do with the representation of gender in the novel.

As W.M. Verhoeven notes, *The English Patient*, like many of Ondaatje's novels, deals with the exploration of the "problematic and indeterminate nature" of identity; his texts question "the nature and origin of the self and [explore] ways to reflect and represent the self in

verbal constructs" (22). In all Ondaatje's texts the male figure as central 'self' is problematized, in that any realization that there is one "essential, knowable self" is deemed impossible (Verhoeven, 24). Billy the Kid, Charles 'Buddy' Bolden, and even Patrick Lewis all illustrate the tension between the language that constructs them and the language they deploy to construct themselves. With the earlier female characters, that tension is less perceptible because Ondaatje has simply placed too much distance between the actual character and the language that represents her to allow her to assert any sort of self; the female self is, in other words, only the 'other' to the male self/speaker/author. In *The English Patient*, however, Ondaatje does attempt to construct Hana as a character reflecting a sense of this 'self', one that is potentially unknowable, yet worthy of a gendered examination.

Ondaatje begins his treatment of Hana's identity historically, in the wake of Patrick's death; the pain caused by his death and by the many deaths she had witnessed before his essentially marks Hana as emotionally wounded -- like the English patient himself. It is after the death of Patrick, for example, that Hana 'ends her war' by turning away from the troops leaving Italy and choosing to stay with the burned patient who -- perhaps like Hana herself -- is too fragile to be moved. It is also after Patrick's death that Hana cuts her hair, an action tirelessly symbolic in literature and films as a transformation of self, a mark of change. Indeed, Ondaatje presents the action as a "contract" Hana makes with herself, a fragile assertion of control in a world where the 'contracts' of caring for her patients exist "only until death" (51). The action resonates in the text as a specifically female act – the long hair of youth and a particular form of femininity is shorn, reflecting a sparse boyishness that suggests a rejection of a traditionally feminine persona. Curiously, long hair is a central symbol in the text: not only does it represent traditional femininity, but it also represents a pre-war Hana who is healthy and

unconstrained.[4] When she cuts her hair after Patrick's death, she metaphorically shears away any link to her very recent and far too painful past. She cuts it after waking from sleep "on the floor beside a mattress where someone lay dead", with "the irritation of its presence during the previous days still in her mind -- when she had bent forward and her hair had touched blood in a wound" (49). After cutting it, she contends that now "[s]he would have nothing to link her, to lock her, to death" (50). She keeps her hair cut short throughout the novel -- Ondaatje reminding the reader several times that she continues to cut it -- until the narrator, through the imaginings of Kirphal Singh, sees Hana after the war, "her hair longer, in her own country" (219, 300). The image here of Hana with her hair 'restored' to its former length would seem to signal Hana's ultimate release from the 'contract' she invented for herself in order to symbolically and literally sever the link between herself and the death precipitated by the surrounding war.

We also learn, however, that long hair signals a feminine vulnerability in males: when the young sapper, Kirphal Singh, or Kip, spreads his long hair out to dry in the sun, he seems "suddenly vulnerable" in this "fragile posture, looking more like a corpse from a myth than anything living or human" (217). Only in washing or in lovemaking is his hair set free. But in lovemaking, replacing the figure of a corpse is the figure of a woman: "At night, when she lets his hair free, he is once more another constellation...She holds an Indian goddess in her arms, she holds wheat and ribbons. As he bends over her it pours. She can tie it against her wrist. As he moves she keeps her eyes open to witness the gnats of electricity in his hair in the darkness of the tent" (218). In this passage Ondaatje transforms Kip into a female "goddess" whose hair, like Angela D.'s in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid,* is connected to electricity; Angela's "black hair swivel[s] off her / shattering the pillow...the tall gawky body spitting electric / off

the sheets to my arm" (16). While Angela's body is compared to "machines," Kip's body is figured as natural, as "wheat," and his hair offers ornamental "ribbons" which Hana "can tie...against her wrist". Kip is illustrated in this passage, through a symbolic gender reversal (from male to 'goddess'), as reinstating Hana's rejected femininity; as supplying for her an aspect of her former self that she had left behind. She can set his hair 'free' here as a symbol of spiritual freedom which she will not allow herself when alone, restricting herself instead to 'living like a vagrant', with her one dress, shorn hair, stolen shoes and hammock. She is shown, in other words, to need him to set her own 'self' free again. And with the clear symbolic link of long hair to femininity, it would seem that this original self is specifically female and that Kip, the male, will ultimately allow her to reclaim her body, and her self, as female.

Hana is constructed from the novel's start as cultivating for herself a screen of anonymity, removing from herself the signs or markers of identity. Hair is just one such marker. Another is her name. Hana is *not* named in the text until Caravaggio's arrival; up to this point she is only 'she' or the 'young woman'. It is as if, after Caravaggio's entrance, she must admit that she does indeed possess a name, an identity, and a past that are known and cannot be escaped completely. She is discovered, quite literally, by Caravaggio, who sees in Hana the relative child she was when he last saw her. His presence, then, links her to her childhood self and to a childlike status – a link that is reinforced by her nearly-achieved desire to "turn away from being an adult" (52). From the beginning of the novel, then, she is essentially 'not-herself'; she is only a woman who is intent on rejecting her past and the markers that place her in a specific past, country, and even gender. And even when Hana is 'discovered' by Caravaggio, who strips away her cultivated anonymity because he 'knew her when', she is still for a time only a woman cultivating her own small world, limiting the outward signs of any

identity beyond the 'essentials', and severing herself from the markers of gender.

Ondaatje presents Hana from the novel's beginning as building the smallest world for herself, after her larger world of friends and family has collapsed around her: she keeps for herself only her "hammock and her shoes and her frock. She was secure in the miniature world she had built; the two other men seemed distant planets, each in his own sphere of memory and solitude" (47). Quite clearly, she sets herself apart from the other inhabitants of the villa and leaves unmarked the new space she occupies. The hammock, for example, allows Hana to remain mobile, transient as a "vagrant" (while the English patient "reposed in his bed like a king") without identifying herself with any particular space (14). Her shoes, stolen from a dead man under her care, allow her to walk quietly, skirting the loud, belligerent talk of men (12). Just as she cuts her hair, Hana erases anything deemed excessive. When Kip imagines Hana grown fully again after the war, for example, he thinks about "her hair longer, in her own country," "all he can witness is her character and the lengthening of her dark hair, which falls again and then again into her eyes" (300). It may be hopeful or tender for Kip to imagine Hana as growing into herself after the trauma of the war, but his sense of her future nevertheless confirms that the self she represents at the villa is actually an aberration -- a closing off of the self against the possibility of further wounding.

She is from the start damaged by the death and emotional pain that revolve around men: the death of her father, and all of the soldiers under her care who once "treated her like gold because [she] was female" (85). In this, it seems her gender -- as well as her general past -- is being rejected because of the pain that has accompanied her identification with being female. However, the end of the novel infers that she has recovered, with time, and because of the relationships she has had with the English patient, Caravaggio, and Kip. And it is primarily the

heterosexual relationship with Kip that permits Hana to express a joy she cannot allow herself until his arrival, to reclaim, perhaps, a lost self that existed before the text begins.

The character of Hana is constructed as female in the text principally through Ondaatje's emphasis on her character as 'other' to the men around her -- in spite of her own efforts to 'pare down' her gendered self. As Lorna Irvine points out, Ondaatje uses the simile of a "lean dark gun" (10) to describe the Bedouin healer who cared for the English patient in the desert,

> a simile that associates colour, violence and maleness, an association chromatically developed throughout the novel. The three male characters are often described as being dark, while Hana is light. The difference...makes these men seem as foreign as Kip when he worked among the 'wise white fatherly men' (*EP* 105) of the British secret service. (143)

We can see Hana within the text as being both equated with, and differentiated from, the Bedouin healers who cared for the English patient. When the English patient sees Hana, for example, "at the hospital in Pisa, he thought he saw beside him the face that had come each night and chewed and softened the dates and passed them down into his mouth" (6). The dates of the Bedouin healer recall, here, the plums that Hana tenderly peels and places in the English patient's mouth. However, we are also told that Hana differs from the male healers in that they saved him for his "usefulness", exacting "payment with his skill" at identifying the weapons presented to him (21). As her 'payment,' Hana does not exact anything but a reciprocal healing from the patient.

Ondaatje posits the English patient as a replacement for her father (Zarb, 72), and the patient cares for Hana accordingly, in a tender and paternal fashion. When he first sees her in the hospital, for example, he observes that she is "separate from the others" and knows from her "dead glances" that she was "more patient than nurse" (95-96). As Ondaatje admits,

"everyone thinks they're healing everybody else, in some way, but they're all wounded" (Wachtel, 253). Those lean, dark guns in the desert reflect no such vulnerability. And Caravaggio tells Hana, in fact, that "those men in the desert were smarter than you. They assumed he could be useful. So they saved him, but when he was no longer useful they left him" (45). Ondaatje again asserts a dangerous coldness associated with the healing of men, compared to a vulnerability associated with the female caregiver.

Even in her role as caregiver, then, Hana is vulnerable, and appears to require the care of her patient. Although the two clearly need each other, it remains clear that the central figure is the patient. Ondaatje asserts in another interview that, although "there are four characters in the book, for me, I really see that the patient and Kip are the two that take the center stage and Hana and Caravaggio are the watchers in this book. Although their healing is crucial to the book, they are sort of the watchers to the story" (Zarb, 72-73). In contrast with his other portrayals of females, however, Ondaatje's portrayal of Hana involves his granting of a voice with which she can assert her own 'side of the story.' Her perspective as a 'watcher' is considered important to the book. She is even, in one passage, permitted to point out Ondaatje's own authorial penchant for populating his texts with more credible males than females. Going out of the house to stretch, Hana notes that there are "[t]oo many men in the house. Her mouth leans against the bare arm of her shoulder. She smells her skin, the familiarity of it. One's own taste and flavour" (90). Such a passage provides the reader with some indication that Ondaatje is consciously addressing the absence of a female perspective in previous texts, allowing Hana a sensual self that is autonomous and independent of any male involvement. The passage thus seems to address the fact that, as De Lauretis points out, "female sexuality has been invariably defined both in contrast and in relation to the male" (4).

While Hana has her moment of auto-eroticism, however, that moment is brief and swiftly overtaken by a repeated textual emphasis on Hana's growth and healing in a specifically male -- and heterosexual -- context. Ondaatje does allow Hana's subjectivity to appear unmediated through male experience, but he is unable to separate the reconstitution of female selfhood from the apparent healing power of the phallus.

In another passage that reflects Hana as an autonomous being, protecting her carefully constructed identity, Ondaatje presents Hana as asserting the danger she perceives between herself and a masculine presence in the villa. Hana attempts to place a protective wall between herself and the male, as she sits weeping, interrupted by Caravaggio's entrance, at the villa's kitchen table: "She began to moan so the sound would be a barrier between them, a river across which she could not be reached" (44). Although the threat here is deliberately presented as benign, with Caravaggio described as caring only for her mental state -- "The deepest sorrow, he thought. Where the only way to survive is to excavate everything" (44) -- the author's attention to Hana's distress, provoked here by a male entering her guarded space, indicates an awareness on Ondaatje's part of the boundaries that she erects between herself and men. Hana here observes and attempts to protect herself against a perceived sexual threat. She warns Caravaggio: "Don't touch me if you're going to try and fuck me" (44) -- a statement which resonates with Hana's learned distrust of men.

Ondaatje allows Hana to explain her anger and distrust in a speech that is presented later in the text, and focuses on her experiences as a female nurse. She delivers this speech to the "uncle"-like (85) Caravaggio, explaining both the reasons for her withdrawal from 'official' nursing and her preoccupation with the English patient. By cultivating this trust between the two characters, Ondaatje provides an audience for Hana's distinctly female perspectives on her

war experiences. She speaks here of the "hunger" of men, of her fatigue with "just being lusted at" by soldiers who wanted from her the "last dances before they died" -- by those and who called her a 'snob' because she "stepped away" from it all (85). Although wanting to return home, Hana maintains simply that "there was no one at home" (85). She speaks of herself and of women generally as a commodity of war, as having only a sexual value in a war populated principally by men.[5] By inference, we gather that she sees herself in the same way at the villa: once again with 'too many men' who are perceived as sexually threatening, except for the English patient, who is immobile, a mirror of her burned father, with his "penis sleeping like a seahorse" (4). The passage would then seem to serve as an interesting critical evaluation of the female experience in wartime -- a subject not traditionally handled in male writings about war.

Contextually, however, the reader knows that Kip has already made his arrival at the villa and his distinct impression on Hana, who notes his "shirtless brown body" (72) and watches him through field glasses (76). Although Ondaatje might be suggesting that Hana is replacing the (his) too-often present male gaze with her own, this seems unlikely when examined in the context of the characters' actions. Hana's final assertion to Caravaggio -- that "[i]t has been a long time...since I thought of anything to do with a man" (85) -- is immediately followed by a description of Kip's curious habits and of his impact on their established life at the villa. The assertion of female desire, then, is really just a prelude to a justification for a heterosexual romance that seemingly "heals" the relentless commodification of the female body.

The romance itself proceeds tentatively. At first, we see Hana as "put out that the sapper had strolled casually into this domain, seemed able to surround her, be everywhere" (88). The scripted remark again introduces a female perspective (on male control and power) as

a plot device that is designed, it would seem, to heighten the tension between the potential lovers until the eventual intimacy occurs. Although it does, of course, occur, Ondaatje complicates his habitual presentation of male desire and female submission to that desire, with the complexity of Kip's sexuality. Kip not only appears as a "goddess" to Hana (217), but he is fascinated with an androgynous statue, telling Hana "he had slept beside one [statue] who was a grieving angel, half male, half female, that he had found beautiful. He had lain back, looking at the body, and for the first time during the war felt at peace" (90). Kip, like Hana, possesses characteristics that straddle Ondaatje's usual boundaries between the male and the female.

Clearly, in his construction of both Hana and Kip, Ondaatje is attempting to 'trouble' the boundaries of gender. Just as we see in Ondaatje's previous work the "disappearance of [the] stable and absolute frames of reference" pertaining to genres of writing, in *The English Patient* he seems to be rejecting any 'stable frames of reference' for sex and gender (Llarena-Ascanio, 20). That said, though, Ondaatje nevertheless seems to resist that very rejection, to re-stabilize the transgression of those frames. After Hana has aided Kip with the dismantling of a bomb, Ondaatje shows Kip at war with himself, with his desire and his sense of responsibility. The narrator tells us first that Kip "is now watching Hana as someone young and alone...he had begun to fear her presence during the afternoon dismantling. He had to remove it, or she would be with him each time he approached a fuze. He would be pregnant with her" (114). The passage again produces a kind of gender reversal in the two characters: Kip is 'pregnant' with something he feels he must destroy in a strange recapitulation of Hana's earlier terminated pregnancy. But then Kip corrects himself, as if admitting that he had been creating justifications for avoiding a relationship with Hana:

> No. That wasn't true. He wanted Hana's shoulder, wanted to place his palm over it as he had done in the sunlight when she slept and he had lain there as if in someone's rifle sights, awkward with her...He did not want comfort but he wanted to surround the girl with it, to guide her from this room. He refused to believe in his own weaknesses, and with her he had not found a weakness to fit himself against. Neither of them was willing to reveal such a possibility to the other. (114)

Here Ondaatje at once implies a fluidity to the boundaries of gender and denies that fluidity: Kip finally asserts that it is essentially more 'correct' to possess a paternal attitude towards 'the girl,' more correct to comfort and guide her. Strangely, the passage seems to reflect Ondaatje's own authorial process of de-stabilizing traditional gender construction only to provide a firm and well-trod-on foundation for re-establishing stereotypical gender roles.

On the same page, Ondaatje shows Hana as 'enraged' with Kip's paternalism "earlier, when she saw that he had left the window alcove [upon hearing a bomb blast] .... Knowing that he was protecting them like children from the mine...It had been an insult" (114). But again, instead of serving to assert any real rejection of this paternalism, Hana's female outrage serves mainly to provide fuel for the sexual tension between the two, until the chapter culminates in a standoff: "Now if he moves towards her she will stare him out, will treat him to a similar silence. Let him guess, make a move. She has been approached before by soldiers" (115). Finally, it is Kip who snips the wires of the English patient's hearing aid, to allow a sly privacy for the new couple. Despite Ondaatje's careful efforts to assert equality between the two, the effect of the few pages is to ultimately allow Kip's daring, charm, and paternal 'responsibility' to woo and win the feisty, but finally receptive woman.[6] The gender boundaries are thus re-established.

In representing the sexual relationship between Hana and Kip, Ondaatje maintains

such boundaries; Kip governs the relationship by keeping a distance between their respective 'worlds'. It is Kip, for example, who appears to insist on the month of "formal celibacy between them" (225), although Ondaatje here portrays the decision as mutual, its origin indeterminate: "I don't want to be fucked. I don't want to fuck you. Where he had learned it or she had who knows, in such youth" (225). Only Kip's desire, additionally, is mentioned, a desire that "completed itself only in his deepest sleep while in the arms of Hana, his orgasm something more to do with the pull of the moon, a tug of his body by the night" (225). Female desire is not mentioned in any form. We only learn that "he is a tender lover" (126), which again places Hana's sexual satisfaction in his hands.

We are also told earlier that Kip desires "the comfort of sleep" that Hana provides for him (reminiscent of the comfort his Ayah provided in his youth), when she "sleeps beside him virtuous as a sister...the sapper's body allows nothing to enter him that comes from another world. A boy in love who will not eat the food she gathers, who does not need or want the drug in a needle she could slide into his arm" (126). He does not, therefore, allow Hana to occupy the phallic position, as she may be seen as occupying in terms of the morphine needles she gives to the English patient. And it is Kip, too, who determines the "space" maintained "between them during the day", although the narrator assures us that she "likes the distance he leaves her, the space he assumes is their right" (127). The relationship is determined by Kip, his desire, his arrival and departure, and his insistence on his "self-sufficiency" -- his "ability to turn so easily away from the world" (128) that recalls the lone figure of Hazen Lewis in *In the Skin of a Lion*. It is Kip who is allowed to determine even the equality that Ondaatje attempts to emphasize between the two. It is his voice that notes the absence of weakness in Hana as equaling his own (114); and it is his hand, reaching for Hana's light after the 'contest' in the

in the dark library, that "[turns] off her light so they are equal in darkness (225).

In the sexual relationship between Almasy and Katharine, there is a similar ambiguity surrounding the issue of gender -- an emphasis placed on the equality of the two lovers in terms of character and strength, combined with subtle, yet forceful, etchings of male control. This relationship charts a territory wholly familiar for Ondaatje, since it is described and recounted through the voice of the male English patient, believed at this point to be Count Almasy. Almasy, as the English patient, thus controls the representation of Katharine through reference to his own desires: "I am a man who fasts until I see what I want" (235). And although it is Katharine who approaches him sexually -- "I want you to ravish me" (236) -- we are told, through the English patient, that it "was if she had handed me a knife. Within a month I was her lover" (236). The spectre of the knife suggests several things here. On a narrative level, the knife is, like the Lacanian phallus, an assertion of the English patient's privilege and position as a masculine authority that cannot be gainsaid; on a metaphoric level, the knife is the deadly sexual weapon which kills Katharine, Geoffrey Clifton, and ultimately the English patient/Almasy himself. Their relationship is suffused descriptively with such violent imagery. Katharine, for example, dreams sexually of Almasy before they become lovers: "They had been bent over like animals, and he had yoked her neck back so she had been unable to breathe within her arousal" (149). A year later, the dreams are described as continuing, and, though they are more peaceful, "she recalled the hands at her neck and waited for the mood of calmness between them to swerve to violence" (150). Katharine is shown as recognizing, in waking, that her "desire to slap him...was sexual" too (150).

This is a moment in which the female occupies the space of violence that is usually reserved for the male in Ondaatje's texts. Although she 'hands' Almasy 'the knife' to begin their

sexual relationship, she remains not only implicated in the violence that continues as the relationship progresses -- "He would step into an embrace with her, glancing first to see what moveable objects were around" (154) -- but also presented as the principal maker of (literal) scars. Almasy goes over his "list of wounds," including the "bite marks" of a "fork that entered the back of his shoulder," the "bruises or a bandaged head," a "welt" on his forearm (153-154), while we learn nothing of Katherine's bodily markings -- at least not until the passage describing her death. The narrator additionally presents Katharine as fully willing to accept her role as author of these scars when, impatient with her husband and Madox's being unable to explain Almasy's sudden wealth of wounds, she suggests slyly: "Maybe it's a woman he met...Look, isn't that a woman's scratch or bite?" (154).

The scars in *The English Patient* are treated as the 'natural' gifts of love: "I believe in such cartography," the English patient asserts, "to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience" (261). Textually, then, we learn through Almasy that these scars on Almasy and Katharine are not necessarily or exclusively the etchings of ownership, but instead serve as signs representing experience with the 'other' nature – an experience that is delivered from a male standpoint, unmarked by access to that 'other nature'. And in Almasy's reference to being 'marked by nature', we might also see woman as being identified firmly with nature as Mother Earth, because, in De Lauretis' words, she appears in this text to be associated with "the womb, the earth, the space of [the hero's] movement" (43). Katharine may therefore not be blamed for leaving such marks, since it is apparently "natural" to leave scars. When Caravaggio is first 'marked' by the female photographer who captures him on film, he does not blame her: "I was

caught jumping from a woman's window. That woman I told you about, who took the photograph. Not her fault" (54). Neither does he blame the woman who is called in to cut off his thumbs when he is later marked: she was "an innocent, knew nothing about me, my name or nationality or what I may have done" (56).

Similarly, Katharine is described by the English patient as "an innocent," who, during their first waltz, studies him with "an unconquerable face...surprised at something in [him]" (144). The English patient, like the speaker in the poem "The Time Around Scars," who contemplates, somewhat nostalgically, a woman who receives a scar from him, assigns no blame for the scarring. Instead this marking is an "intimate exchange and echo of childhood history, of scar, of manner of kiss" (*EP* 153). However, unlike the scar inflicted in Ondaatje's early poem, or this reference to an 'intimate exchange' of scars, many scars in *The English Patient* are not the subjects for poetic, wistful reverie. Caravaggio's thumbs are cut off; his hands -- perhaps a thief's most valuable possession -- are destroyed. The English patient himself becomes a scar, marked so severely by his relationship with Katharine and its consequences that he is turned inside out, left with no identity, and no name that he wishes to recall. His disfigured body seems an extension of the scarring begun by Katharine, and their passionate, violent relationship.

The text does suggest that it is Almasy who claims responsibility for the violence of his relationship with Katharine. After Geoffrey Clifton crashes the plane, killing himself and badly wounding Katharine, Almasy takes her to the Cave of Swimmers. It is here that he 'translates' Katharine into something "eternal," taking the paint from the cave drawings to mark her body:

> He looked up to the one cave painting and stole the colours from it. The ochre went into her face, he daubed blue around her eyes...The pubis. Hoops of colour around her legs so she would be immune to the human. There were traditions he had discovered in Herotodus in which old warriors celebrated their loved ones by locating and holding them in whatever world made them eternal -- a colourful fluid, a song, a rock drawing. (248)

We are told that Katharine "was a woman who translated her face when she put on makeup" (248), a reference which seems to muffle the impact of this act, the man translating the woman, and 'holding' her in the world of his choosing -- 'immortalizing' her, essentially, as his lover.

A suggestion of the possible impropriety of this act comes a few pages later, as the English patient witnesses "the terrible snarl, violent and intimate" from a dying Katharine, as if a "creature had entered her" (260). And in the passage following, he reveals that:

> I was taught as a child about the demon lover. I was told about a beautiful temptress who came to a young man's room. And he, if he were wise, would demand that she turn around, because demons and witches have no back, only what they wish to present to you. What had I done? What animal had I delivered into her?... Had I been her demon lover?...This country -- had I charted it and turned it into a place of war? (260)

Almasy, here, attempts to understand, in retrospect, what he has done to his beloved Katharine and his beloved desert. That the two are connected or fused is made clear throughout the text. The female body as country, or landscape is, as I have argued, a recurring motif in Ondaatje's work. Such symbolism is reflected in the novel in the recurrent instances of the cartographer's naming of the land with a lover's name, as if to simulate the comfort he finds in a woman: "a man in the desert can slip into a name as if within a discovered well, and in its shadowed coolness be tempted never to leave such containment" (140-141). Almasy ultimately marks Katharine as she marked him, their relationship, like the desert, 'translating' into a theatre of war. In the war between the two of them and Geoffrey Clifton, Katharine emerges explicitly as

the site that is eventually marked.

With the marking of Katherine's body, Almasy seems to lay final claim to her, for although she says that she hates "ownership", he nevertheless wishes to possess her. This is made clear even before the plane accident, in the apartment in Cairo, when Almasy insists: "This is my shoulder...not her husband's, this is my shoulder" (156). And in the cave, he registers that he "knew he already had her nature tight in his fist" (248). In spite of his own sense of responsibility for the violence/passion he has released – a passion / violence that culminates in his own burned body -- Almasy does not regret the marking: "We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes...I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead" (261). And all this is indeed marked on Almasy, textually, for through the burned body we learn of this story -- his version. Almasy ultimately 'translates' his own desires through the body of the female.

In an earlier passage, Ondaatje emphasizes this male 'translation' of the female body, affirming that what is being translated is male desire onto that body. Symbolically, the passage recreates a scene witnessed by the English patient while being cared for by the Bedouin: the semen of a young boy "arousing himself" in a dance is collected and given to the English patient as a gift, for "[i]n the desert you celebrate nothing but water" (23). Katharine, "a woman who had grown up within gardens, among moistness...always happier in rain" (170), lies dead in the desert, and is given the same 'gift' of water/semen by the English patient: "I approached her naked as I would have done in our South Cairo room, wanting to undress her, still wanting to love her" (170). Although the passage is not explicit in identifying a sexual act here, that act is quite clearly implied: "Felhomaly. The dusk of graves. With the connotation of intimacy there between the dead and the living" (170).[7]

The necrophilic attraction that the English patient expresses towards Katharine is Almasy's final 'gift' to Katharine -- the gift of water in the parched atmosphere of the desert to one who has valued it highly. She also "would have hated to die without a name" (170), but it is a name the English patient cannot grant her -- except for in the story he passes on to Hana, Caravaggio and the reader. There is some guilt implied by the English patient about the 'felhomaly', however, which he justifies through passion. "What is terrible in what I did?" he asks his listeners: "Don't we forgive everything of a lover? We forgive selfishness, desire, guile. As long as we are the motive for it. You can make love to a woman with a broken arm, or a woman with fever. She once sucked blood from a cut on my hand as I had tasted and swallowed her menstrual blood" (170). Reciprocity between the dead and the living, however, is difficult at best. And through Ondaatje's articulation of Katharine as a dead body that is marked by Almasy's vision of their earlier love and last sexual act, Ondaatje allows, however tenderly, the female to rest as a corporeal symbol for male sexual inscription, as forever receptive and eternally defined by his imaginings.

Ondaatje, however, complicates this lasting symbol by dismantling it in the airplane -- the body falls apart. What has been inscribed disappears. As the English patient has been "disassembled" by Katharine in love (155), so is she -- as her body -- quite literally disassembled. In the airplane, Katharine's body is transformed into acacia branches: "A branch breaks free of her shirt. Acacia and bone" (175). And as oil spills and catches fire with a spark, her body literally disintegrates in his vision: "acacia twigs, leaves, the branches that were shaped into arms uncoiling around him...The woman translated into leaves and twigs, the broken glass to the sky like a jaw above him" (175). According to Stephen Scobie, the moment Almasy's hand breaks the glass to the cockpit "is, in Ondaatje's imagery, the moment the self-destructive

artist most fully declares himself, both as artist and as victim -- victim of the violence he evokes in those around him, and victim also of the violence within himself, within his own art" (102). The artist, Ondaatje, is creator and destroyer, as we have seen in so many of his works, creating here the symbol, receptacle for male desire, only to dismantle it, and in doing so, acknowledging his own culpability in its fragile construction. For the woman is clearly drawn as a symbol here: the tree in the desert which has absorbed the smoke from the fire he made in the cave with acacia branches (248). Perhaps additionally she is the smoke from the "twig fire" near which she recited the poem that caused him to fall in love with her (143) -- only to finally become, like him, a fire herself, ultimately unreadable.

Katharine is constructed through the English patient's narrative as, in many ways, his mirror: his narrative reflects both her, and the way that he sees himself. The narrator, for example, has the English patient describe himself, too, as feeling as if "he contains smoke," as if "everything is missing from his body" (157) after the relationship with Katharine ends. The symbolic transformation of Katharine into burning acacia leaves, then, would seem to recall this reference -- the heart, the "organ of fire," is broken, damaged irreparably (97). This parallel, like many of the other parallels drawn between Hana and Kip, may allow some discussion of Ondaatje's construction of female as a mirror to the male, in action and in constructed image. As in *In the Skin of a Lion*, the female is constructed as a way to reflect the male, an image in which the male protagonist can define himself. There are, indeed, many mirror images -- literally, the same images reversed -- throughout *The English Patient*. The English patient and Kip, for example, mirror Kipling's *Kim:* "In recent days, Hana had watched [Kip] sitting beside the English patient, and it seemed to her a reversal of *Kim*. The young student was now Indian, the wise old teacher was English" (111). In a different kind of reversal, Hana gets inserted into

this mirror: when she reads to the English patient, "it was Hana who was the young boy in the story" (111). The English patient himself may be seen as a mirror for Hana, acting as a reflective "pool for her" (41) in which she can see her burned father.

But mirrors, we see in the text, can also reflect the unrecognizable. When Hana glimpses herself in a mirror and notes the reflection as specifically female , for instance, she responds: "'She'...'Hi Buddy,' she said. She peered into her look, trying to recognize herself' (52). Mirrors are unreliable. Literally, they show the self reversed, the aspect of the self that is unknown. As the English patient observes: "When we are young we do not look into mirrors. It is when we are old, concerned with our name, our legend, what our lives will mean to the future" (141). Similarly, the text operates as a mirror on many levels: "A novel is a mirror walking down a road" (91). For Ondaatje, though, who can reach through the mirror to access the male image, the female is still unattainable. With Hana, he notes finally that "there is something in her brow now that only she can recognize in a mirror" (301), confirming his inability as author to fully represent her.

A distance, or an unbridgeable wall of gender, similarly remains between Almasy and Katharine, who functions as his mirror image. In love, at least temporarily, these walls are permitted to drop. Like the walls in the bombed out villa, which allow Hana's glimpses of Kip, and Kip's of Hana, there are spaces where intimacy may occur. Ondaatje, speaking to Wachtel about his creation of the villa, admits that he "had to remove some of the furniture and displace some of the walls" (252). This, we may assert, allows entrance into the space of the 'other', otherwise prohibited by social and personal barriers. Almasy speaks of the walls Katharine places around herself, "the wall of her class", and then the walls erected because of the confusion of separation: "she misinterprets his behaviour, assuming this is what he wants,

and doubles the size of the wall to protect herself" (155). She, in turn, speaks of his walls erected with "angry jokes" amidst company, the bitterness and self-sufficiency (172) he resorts to in his separation from her. It is when these walls are firmly in place that the English patient "bought pale brown cigarette papers and glued them into sections of *The Histories* that recorded wars that were of no interest to him. He wrote down all her arguments against him. Glued into the book -- giving himself only the voice of the watcher, the listener, the 'he'" (172). Ondaatje's metafictional reference to Almasy's rewriting of history -- his substitution of himself for another "he" -- forges links between Almasy and Ondaatje as authors who may well attempt to "displace some of the walls" erected around gender distinctions; but those walls are constantly replaced by the consistency of the male gaze of the female other.

Almasy clearly regards Katharine -- like his 'commonplace book,' *The Histories,* into which he pastes his choice of material -- as a kind of text: "Her life with others no longer interests [Almasy]...He wants the minute and secret reflection between them, the depth of field minimal, their foreignness intimate like two pages of a closed book" (155). As mirror here, Katharine is a 'foreign' reflection. The possibility of intimacy exists, but union -- because of the absent autonomy of the female -- is impossible. D. Mark Simpson notes more specifically that the

> insistence here is not simply on a utopian dissolution of alterity, but rather on an irascible and tantalizing proximity in difference that at once compels and agonizes imperial ambition, imperial memory, imperial desire caught between colonial and postcolonial scenes. Threat and temptation bleed together in the recognition that difference is neither absolute nor distant but viscerally proximate, and moreover illegible precisely through a surplus of signs -- "like two pages of a closed book," pressed together in a misreflection of meaning. (223)

Simpson's reading is a postcolonial one, but in much of the text, gender and colonialism are

closely related. As Eve Sedgwick writes: "it may be that there exists for nations, as for genders, simply no normal way to partake of the categorical definitiveness of the national, no single kind of 'other' of what a nation is to which all can by the same structuration be definitionally opposed" (quoted in Simpson, 218). The female is to male what nation is to nation: the differences are apparent, but blurred by proximity. Even with walls removed, with intimacy achieved, in other words, alterity remains, stubborn and persistent.

In Almasy's desire for the "foreignness intimate like two pages of a closed book," the female is 'othered' to the 'colonial' male as the 'opposite' page of text, as connected, but distinct. Ondaatje acknowledges the impossibility of her colonization in emphasizing the English patient's desire for intimacy without collapsing the distinction between self and the other, by retaining the identity of the opposite page. Nonetheless, that page remains unreadable in such intimacy. By moving too closely to the page (or perhaps by reading it too closely), he finds it becomes illegible. One would think that both pages should become unreadable in this proximity. It is, however, the female that remains blurred, for we know that it is the male gaze that reads and translates her story. This observation may explain much about Ondaatje's traditional representation of women in his texts; they are present and distinct, but also unrepresentable in terms of the male voice.

This authorial inability to fully represent the female, as a recurring feature in Ondaatje's work, culminates in the narrator's final comments about Hana at the end of *The English Patient.* After having acknowledged that there is "something in her brow now that only she can recognize in a mirror," Ondaatje finally admits that he loses Hana, that his 'grasp' of her image is too loose to hold her within any one frame: "She is a woman I don't know well enough to hold in my wing, if writers have wings, to harbour for the rest of my life" (301). Turning to the

first person here, Ondaatje implicates himself in the text -- another recurring feature of his writing -- but this time, he does so with reference to a female, rather than male, character. With characters such as Billy the Kid, Buddy Bolden, and Patrick Lewis, Ondaatje implicates himself in the text for the purpose of forging a connection between author and character; he identifies his authority, in other words, with those characters. With reference to Hana, the implication of author in the text serves to highlight difference rather than sameness, to admit to his inability to represent Hana, the female protagonist, outside of the context of men.

Geert Lernout observes that "Hana, the Canadian nurse, is not the central character: she seems to function more as a link between the three men than as an independent person" (125). And Ondaatje's ending seems to verify the observation. Even in this ending, he 'links' Hana's ending to that of Kirphal Singh, as the glass and fork drop simultaneously, across continents. Ondaatje, like Kip, can only represent Hana in the environment he has chosen, cannot see her otherwise. Similarly, characters such as Sallie Chisum, Angela Dickinson, Nora Bass, Robin Brewitt, Clara Dickens, and Alice Gull are all represented through male eyes, and in the context of men. They are, as a result, incomplete portraits, in that Ondaatje's insistence on the feminine 'realities' always already outside the represented 'frame' emphasizes their inadequacy as 'complete' characterizations. His emphasis on boundaries, additionally -- and specifically the boundaries of gender -- reinforces the 'otherness' of the female characters, and their consequent distance from both male characters and the masculine writing voice.

Through examining *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, *Coming Through Slaughter*, *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient* in chronological sequence, I have suggested that a progressive pattern emerges in terms of Ondaatje's representation of women. Whereas characters like Sallie and Angela in *The Collected Works*, and Nora and Robin in *Coming Through*

Slaughter exhibit traits which accord with highly conventional female 'types,' Ondaatje nonetheless constructs a narrative framework, with its layers of mediation, that distances him from the production of those 'types.' In other words, he represents the male characters as constructing the female in their own chosen images. Ondaatje also, however, provides the reader with the critical resources with which to question these male characters' constructions and thereby implicates himself in the process of their representations. In later texts, such as *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*, the author seems to take a step closer to the female, reducing the mediating layers of narrative to provide the female with a voice of her own. In doing so, however, he as author takes a step closer to acknowledging his own limitations in terms of creating a female character with whom he can identify. Because of her role as 'other' to masculine characters and narrators, or, better, because of the boundaries of gender which Ondaatje has textually established and re-established, the female "other always eludes the meanings with which [he seeks] to fix her" (Geyer-Ryan, 3). Despite the many challenges to such boundaries of gender within his work, Ondaatje asserts in his work that the female cannot be adequately or completely represented through his masculine discourse. While the 'fiction' of the female may, then, belong to him, the 'complete' female consistently eludes his grasp.

Endnotes

General Introduction

[1] It is clear that this subject is a woman in the context of *Secular Love* as a whole. This collection creates a series of poems exploring the trauma of ending a heterosexual marriage, and the joy of finding new love.

Chapter One: "Male Chaos and the 'Blurred' Female Figure in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*"

[1] See Scobie for a reading of this 'explanation' for Billy's violence as somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Scobie suggests that Ondaatje, in his easy explanation that clearly omits many facts, is actually pointing out that there can be no one explanation for a series of actions, or no "simplistic psychological 'explanations' for the source of Billy's violence" (194).

[2] Ondaatje emphasizes the exaggerated construction of unbelievable female 'types' in the section "Billy the Kid and the Princess." York observes that he here "sports with the stereotypes of the helpless heroine and the femme fatale" (77).

[3] Dennisoff additionally notes what he perceives to be homosexual moments in the text which provide evidence arguing against such 'masculinity,' and which promote, generally, a "sexual ambiguity throughout the text" (53).

Chapter Two: "Creating the Ideal Mirror: *Coming Through Slaughter*"

[1] I refer here to gender performativity in the terms of Judith Butler, who points out that "gender reality is created through sustained social performances" rather than by "notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity" (141). In the context of *Coming Through Slaughter*, it is clear that a masculine discourse shapes the "gender reality" within the text, and that the consistently masculine gaze constructing the female in his image amounts to a 'performance' that posits the male as controlling female representation. This repeated assertion of male narrative control is the "constituted social [or textual] temporality" that defines gender in the text *(141)*.

[2] Barry Maxwell observes that the "central symbol cluster of *Coming Through Slaughter* is composed of mirrors and windows, representative of every sort of physical and psychic confinement, and clouds and sky, to which we are released only through extreme acts of violence, love or art" (105-6), locating Bolden's attempt to break windows here as an attempt to "release" himself from perceived confinement.

Chapter Three: "Half Revealed Women in *In the Skin of a Lion*"

[1] Further parallels between the two stories are evident throughout *In the Skin of a Lion*. Patrick's sojourn in the Garden of the Blind after Alice's death, for example, when he meets a blind woman and tells her of his loss, mirrors Gilgamesh's visit to the garden of the gods to relate his story of grief and loss to a woman, Siduri. Patrick, like Gilgamesh, also ultimately falls asleep in the presence of the man he has sought to find. Gilgamesh, in the epic, cannot live up to the challenge to vanquish sleep for six days and seven nights, just as Patrick cannot vanquish sleep as daylight approaches to carry out his violent plan, and to immortalize himself in the historical record.

[2] That Patrick is not the narrator is illustrated throughout the text, and most clearly in a passage noting the distinction between the 'I' of the narrator and Patrick as 'he': "She could move like...she could sing as low as...Why is it that I am now trying to uncover every facet of Alice's nature for myself? He wants everything of Alice to be with him here in this room as if she is not dead" (147-148).

[3] Patrick may also be seen as rejecting traditional models of masculinity in his refusal, at the end of the novel, to blow up the Waterworks according to plan, and in his decision to communicate with Harris (rather than isolate him) by telling him the story of Alice Gull.

[4] Naming in the text seems to convey a means of assimilating, of 'knowing' a person or thing while leaving vital information out of the frame of the actual name. Trinh T. Minh-ha observes in this respect that "Naming is part of the human rituals of incorporation, and the unnamed remains less human than the inhuman or sub-human. The threatening Otherness must, therefore, be transformed into figures that belong to a definite image-repertoire" (54). In terms of the immigrant labourers, this 'threatening Otherness' is alleviated by giving them English names. For Patrick Lewis, as a child, naming also allows him to come to terms with the exotic 'otherness' of the insect world, giving visiting insects fictional names, and then later discovering their real names (9-10).

[5] Again, our attention is drawn to the ambiguous boundary between waking and sleeping. Like the episode in the Waterworks, when Patrick falls asleep before Harris, and its equivalent in the Epic of Gilgamesh, sleep in the novel allows release, through dreams, from the pain of loss. The passage spoken by Harris in the text, taken from the Gilgamesh Epic, clarifies this: "He lay down to sleep, until he was woken from out of a dream. He saw the lions around him glorying in life; then he took his axe in his hand, he drew his sword from his belt, and he fell upon them like an arrow from the string" (242). Neither Patrick, nor Gilgamesh, achieves his ultimate revenge. But it is in sleep that each sees the pointlessness of that revenge. That Hazen Lewis in this passage might not be sleeping seems to suggest that he has no such release from a life-denying impulse.

[6] See Fotios Sarris's excellent article on the relationship between silence and light in *In the Skin*

of a Lion.

[7] This passage itself, in fact, is a testament to Ondaatje's own perceptions and misperceptions of female behaviour. He goes so far as to have Alice laughingly ask Clara if they are "witches," and the night is completed by the women running outside, Clara stripping off her shirt, and baying at an absent moon (76). Whether or not this is intended to be ironic is left unclear.

[8] The passage also recalls Ondaatje's earlier poetic writing, in which authorial 'knowledge' of the female based on his own expectations and perceptions may act as a kind of 'container'. In this passage from Secular Love, Ondaatje writes: "It is only recently that I am able to wake beside you and without looking, almost in a dream, put out my hand and know exactly where your shoulder or your heart will be...And at times this has seemed to be knowledge. As if you were a blueprint of your house" (*Secular Love*, 87). In this context, the 'seeming' of such knowledge is emphasized, in that writer 'seems to know' this woman based on his own expectations of where she *might* be positioned.

[9] The stone that Clara asks Patrick to 'remember' here is the one "swallowed years back" by Patrick, "that had grown with him and which he carried around because he could not shed it," a stone which was originally a "flint of terror" (71). It is a flint that marks the boundaries between the self and community, an aesthetic taught to Patrick by his father and his romance 'heros'. Although Patrick may, in the end, succeed in connecting all of the discontinuous moments of his life, in the telling of this story to Hana, Ondaatje insists that this flint remains.

Chapter Four: "Reflections of the Unknown: Female Characters in *The English Patient*"

[1] Douglas Barbour first noted that the real time and fictional time between *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient* is the same – five years (207).

[2] The image recalls the myth of Icarus, who, in being presented with wings as a means to escape imprisonment, uses them to fly too close to the sun. His proximity to the sun then, of course, loosens the glue holding the wings in place and precipitates his fall. The myth is relevant to the text of *The English Patient* in that Daedalus, Icarus' father, tells his son: "Escape may be checked by water and land, but the air and the sky are free" (Hamilton, 193). The desert is, for the English Patient, a symbol of freedom, an ideal 'world without lines' which for him, as for Icarus, becomes because of his arrogance, the setting for his own demise.

[3] Again, see Zepetnek's intriguing article concerning the 'real' Katharine, Lady East Clayton (146-147).

[4] We also glimpse a pre-war Hana, and note the impact that the war has had on her in her rendition of the "Marseillaise." She sang the song once as a child, Caravaggio noting that instead of singing with "the passion of her at sixteen" she was now "singing it as if it was something scarred, as if one couldn't ever again bring all the hope of the song together. It had been altered by the five years leading to this night of her twenty-first birthday in the forty-fifth year of the twentieth century. Singing in the voice of a tired traveller, alone against everything" (269).

[5] Kip also appears as a representative of an entire social group – in his case of a 'foreign' culture -- with explicitly critical references to this 'othering'. Hana, in one example, is said to imagine "all of Asia through the gestures of this one man" (217).

[6] Some additional examples of Ondaatje's insistence on the equality of the two might be witnessed in the author's presentation of Kip as feeling himself in 'someone's rifle sights' as Hana has been in his, and in the characters' parallel reluctance to demonstrate any sign of weakness.

[7] Totosy de Zepetnek translates the word 'felhomaly' differently than does Ondaatje, placing his emphasis on shades of light, rather than on the feeling that those shades may evoke. For Totosy de Zepetnek, 'felhomaly' means "semidarkness," "dusk," or "twilight" (142).

Works Cited

Bok, Christian. "Destructive Creation: The Politicization of Violence in the Works of Michael Ondaatje." *Canadian Literature* 132 (Spring 1992): 109-124.

Bush, Catherine. "Michael Ondaatje: An Interview." *Essays on Canadian Writing: Michael Ondaatje Issue* 53 (Summer 1994): 238-249.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Clarke, George Elliott."Michael Ondaatje and the Production of Myth." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 16:1 (1991): 1-21.

Chalier, Catherine. "Ethics and the Feminine." *Re-Reading Levinas*. Ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Cooley, Dennis. "'I Am Here On the Edge': Modern Hero / Postmodern Poetics in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*." *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje*. Ed. Sam Solecki. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985.

De Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Denisoff, Dennis. "Homosocial Desire and the Artificial Man in Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*." *Essays on Canadian Writing: Michael Ondaatje Issue* 53 (Summer 1994): 51-70.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

Gamlin, Gordon. "Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* and the Oral Narrative." *Canadian Literature* 135 (Winter 1992): 68-78.

Geyer-Ryan, Helga. *Fables of Desire: Studies in the Ethics of Art and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.

Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988.

----. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One.* Trans. Catherine Porter. New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Jacobs, Naomi. "Michael Ondaatje and the New Fiction Biographies." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 11 (Spring 1986): 2-18.

Kamboureli, Smaro. "Outlawed Narrative: Michael Ondaatje." *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem.* Ed. Linda Hutcheon and Paul Perron. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. 184-202.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity.* Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duqesne University Press, 1969.

Maxwell, Barry. "Surrealistic Aspects of Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter.*" *Mosaic* 18 (Summer 1985): 101-114.

Ondaatje, Michael. *The Cinnamon Peeler: Selected Poems.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989.

---. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems.* Concord: House of Anansi Press, 1970.

---. *Coming Through Slaughter.* Concord: House of Anansi Press, 1976.

---. *The English Patient.* McClelland & Stewart, 1992.

---. *In the Skin of a Lion.* Toronto: Penguin Books, 1994.

---. *Running in the Family.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, New Canadian Library edition, 1993.

---. *Secular Love.* Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1984.

Overbye, Karen. "Re-membering the Body: Constructing the Self as Hero in *In the Skin of a Lion.*" *Studies in Canadian Literature* 17:2 (1992): 1-13.

Owens, Judith. "'I Send You a Picture': Ondaatje's Portrait of Billy the Kid." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 8:1 (1983): 117-139.

Sarris, Fotios. "*In the Skin of a Lion:* Michael Ondaatje's Tenebristic Narrative." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 44 (Fall 1991): 183-201.

Scobie, Steven. "Two Authors in Search of a Character: bp Nichol and Michael Ondaatje." *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje.* Ed. Sam Solecki. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1985. 185-210.

Siemerling, Winfried. *Discoveries of the Other: Alterity in the Work of Leonard Cohen, Hubert Aquin, Michael Ondaatje, and Nicole Brossard.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.

Totosy de Zepetnik, Steven Totosy. "The English Patient: 'Truth is Stranger than Fiction'." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (1994): 141-153.

Trinh T. Minh-ha. *Woman, Native, Other.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Turner, Barbara. "In the skin of Michael Ondaatje: giving voice to a social conscience." *Quill and Quire* 53:5 (May 1987): 21-22.

Van Nortwick. *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled: The Second Self and the Hero's Journey in Ancient Epic.* New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Van Wart, Alice. "The Evolution of Form in Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Coming Through Slaughter.*" *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews.* 17 (1985 Fall-Winter): 1-28.

Verhoeven, W.M. "Playing Hide and Seek in Language: Michael Ondaatje's Historiography of the Self." *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 24 (Spring 1994): 21-38.

Wachtel, Eleanor. . "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje." *Essays on Canadian Writing: Michael Ondaatje Issue* 53 (Summer 1994) 251-261.

York, Lorraine. "Whirling Blindfolded in the House of Woman: Gender Politics in the Poetry and Fiction of Michael Ondaatje." *Essays on Canadian Writing: Michael Ondaatje Issue* 53 (Summer 1994): 71-91.

Bibliography

Barbour, Douglas. *Michael Ondaatje.* New York: Twayne, 1993.

Beddoes, Julie. "Which Side Is It On? Form, Class, and Politics in *In the Skin of a Lion.*" *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (Summer 1994): 204-215.

Bellocq, E.J. *E.J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits.* John Szarkowski, ed. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970.

Beran, Carol L. "Ex-Centricity: Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* and Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising.*" *Studies in Canadian Literature* 18:1 (1993): 71-84.

Berger, John, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb, Richard Hollis. *Ways of Seeing.* London: British Boadcasting Corporation, 1985.

Bernasconi, Robert and Simon Critchley, Eds. *Re-Reading Levinas.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Bjerring, Nancy E. "Deconstructing the 'Desert of Facts:' Detection and Antidetection in *Coming Through Slaughter.*" *English Studies in Canada* 16:3 (September 1990): 325-338.

Blott, Anne. "Stories to Finish: *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid.*" *Studies in Canadian Literature* 2:2 (Summer 1977): 188-202.

Bok, Christian. "Destructive Creation: The Politicization of Violence in the Works of Michael Ondaatje." *Canadian Literature* 132 (Spring, 1992): 109-124.

Brown, Andrew G. *The Eye as Author: Photographic Theory in the Works of Michael Ondaatje.* A Thesis in the Department of English. Concordia University, November 1994.

Bush, Catherine. "Michael Ondaatje: An Interview." *Essays on Canadian Writing: Michael Ondaatje Issue* 53 (Summer 1994): 238-249.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex".* New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

---. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

Butterfield, Martha. "The One Lighted Room: *In the Skin of a Lion.*" *Canadian Literature* 119 (Winter 1988): 162-167.

Chalier, Catherine. "Ethics and the Feminine." *Re-Reading Levinas*. Ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Clarke, George Elliott. "Michael Ondaatje and the Production of Myth." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 16:1 (1991): 1-21.

Cooley, Dennis. "'I Am Here On the Edge': Modern Hero / Postmodern Poetics in *The Collected works of Billy the Kid*." *Spider Blues -- Essays on Michael Ondaatje*. Ed. Sam Solecki. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1985.

Coleman, Daniel. "Masculinity's Severed Self: Gender and Orientalism in *Out of Egypt* and *Running in the Family*. *Studies in Canadian Literature* 18:2 (1993): 62-80.

De Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987.

Denisoff, Dennis. "Homosocial Desire and the Artificial Man in Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*." *Essays on Canadian Writing: Michael Ondaatje Issue* 53 (Summer 1994): 51-70.

Derksen, Celeste. "Masculinity and the Mise en Scene: *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*." 20:2 (1995): 22-33.

Docherty, Thomas. "Postmodern Characterization: The Ethics of Alterity." *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*. Edmund J. Smyth, Ed. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1991. 169-188.

Draper, Gary. "Perfect Pitch." *Books in Canada* 21:8 (November 1992): 39-40.

Duffy, Dennis. "A Wrench in Time: A Sub-Sub-Librarian Looks beneath the Skin of a Lion." *Essays on Canadian Writing: Michael Ondaatje Issue* 53 (Summer 1994) 125-140.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

Gamlin, Gordon. "Michael Ondaatje's "In the Skin of a Lion" and the Oral Narrative." *Canadian Literature* 135 (Winter 1992): 68-78.

Ganapathy-Dore, Geetha. "The Novel of the Nowhere Man: Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*." *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 16/2 (Spring 1993): 96-100.

Garvey, Maureen. "Listening to Michael Ondaatje." *Queen's Quarterly* 99:4 (Winter 1992): 928-934.

Geyer-Ryan, Helga. *Fables of Desire: Studies in the Ethics of Art and Gender.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.

Greenstein, Michael. "Ondaatje's Metamorphoses: *In the Skin of a Lion.*" *Canadian Literature* 126 (Autumn 1990): 116-130.

Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942.

Heighton, Steven. "Approaching 'that perfect edge': Kinetic Techniques in the Poetry and Fiction of Michael Ondaatje." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 13/2 (1988): 223-243.

Hutcheon, Linda. "Canadian Historiographic Metafiction." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 30 (1984/85): 228-238.

---. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction.* Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988.

---. "Discourse, Power, Ideology: Humanism and Postmodernism." *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction.* Ed. Edmund J. Smyth. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1991. 169-188.

---. "Ex-Centric." *Canadian Literature* 117 (1988): 132-135.

---. "Michael Ondaatje." *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions.* Ed. Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990.

---. *The Politics of Postmodernism.* London and New York: Routledge, 1989.

Ingelbien, Raphael. "A Novelist's Caravaggism: Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion. The Guises of Canadian Diversity: New European Perspectives.* Ed. Serge Jaumain and Marc Maufort. Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B.V. Amsterdam, 1995. 27-37.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One.* New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Irvine, Lorna. "Displacing the White Man's Burden in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient.*" *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 10:1 (1995): 139-145.

Jacobs, Naomi. "Michael Ondaatje and the New Fiction Biographies." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 11/1 (Spring 1986): 2-18.

Jewinski, Ed. *Michael Ondaatje: Express Yourself Beautifully*. Toronto: ECW Press, 1994.

Jones, Manina. "The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Scripting the Docudrama." *Canadian Literature* 122-123 (Autumn-Winter 1989): 26-38.

Kamboureli, Smaro. "Outlawed Narrative: Michael Ondaatje." *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem*. Ed. Linda Hutcheon, Paul Perron. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. 184-202.

Kanaganayakam, Chelva. "A Trick with A Glass: Michael Ondaatje's South Asian Connection." *Canadian Literature*. 132 (Spring 1992): 33-42.

Kelly, Robert A. "Outlaw and Explorer: Recent Adventures in the English-Canadian Long Poem." *The Antigonish Review* 79 (Autumn 1989): 27-34.

Kertzer, J.M. "On Death and Dying: *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*." *English Studies in Canada* 1 (1975): 86-96.

Kroetsch, Robert. "The Exploding Porcupine: Violence of Form in English-Canadian Fiction." In *Papers from the Conference on Violence in the Canadian Novel since 1960*. Ed. Terry Goldie and Virginia Harger-Grinling. St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1981.

Lee, Dennis. *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1977.

Leckie, Barbara. "Dressing the Heroine: Ondaatje's Lion Skins". *Rubicon* 10 (Fall 1988): 282-289.

Lernout, Geert. "Michael Ondaatje: The Desert of the Soul". *Kunapipi* 14:2 (1992): 124-126.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.

Levine, Elise. "Reading the Labels: Growing Up with Buddy Bolden and Michael Ondaatje." *Books in Canada* 24:7 (October 1995): 28-29.

Llarena-Ascanio, Maria Jesus. "Michael Ondaatje's Use of History." *The Guises of Canadian Diversity: New European Perspectives*. Ed. Serge Jaumain and Marc Maufort. Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B.V. Amsterdam, 1995. 19-26.

Marquis, Donald M. *In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz.* Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978.

Mathews, Robin. "Private Indulgence and Public Discipline: Violence in the English Canadian Novel Since 1960." In *Papers from the Conference on Violence in the Canadian Novel since 1960.* Ed. Terry Goldie and Virginia Harger-Grinling. St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1981.

Maxwell, Barry. "Surrealistic Aspects of Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter.*" *Mosaic* 18:3 (Summer 1985): 101-114.

Mukherjee, Arun P. "The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje and Cyril Dabydeen: Two Responses to Otherness." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 20:1 (1985): 49-67.

Mundwiler, Leslie. *Michael Ondaatje: Word, Image, Imagination.* Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984.

Nodelman, Perry M. "The Collected Photographs of Billy the Kid." *Canadian Literature* 87 (1980): 68-79.

Ondaatje, Michael. *The Cinnamon Peeler: Selected Poems.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989.

---. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems.* Concord: House of Anansi Press, 1970.

---. *Coming Through Slaughter.* Concord: House of Anansi Press, 1976.

---. *The Dainty Monsters.* Toronto: The Coach House Press, Fourth Edition, 1974.

---. *The English Patient.* McClelland & Stewart, 1992.

---. "Garcia Marquez and the Bus to Aracataca." *Figures in a Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature Collected in Honor of Sheila Watson.* Ed. Diane Bessai and David Jackel. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978.

----. *In the Skin of a Lion.* Toronto: Penguin Books, 1994.

---, ed. "Introduction." *The Long Poem Anthology.* Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1979. 11-18.

---. *Leonard Cohen.* Canadian Writers, Number 5. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970.

---. *Rat Jelly.* Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1973.

---. *Running in the Family*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, New Canadian Library edition, 1993.

---. *Secular Love*. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1984.

---. *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do: Poems 1963-1978*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1979.

Oughton, John. "Sane Assassin -- The double life of Michael Ondaatje, mild-mannered professor of English literature and risk-taking celebrator of madmen." *Books in Canada* 12:6 (1983): 7-10.

Overbye, Karen. "Re-membering the Body: Constructing the Self as Hero in *In the Skin of a Lion*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 17:2 (1992): 1-13.

Owens, Judith. "'I Send You a Picture': Ondaatje's Portrait of Billy the Kid." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 8/1 (1983): 117-139.

Pearce, Jon. "Moving to the Clear: Michael Ondaatje." *Twelve Voices: Interviews With Canadian Poets*. Ed. Jon Pearce. Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1980.

Ray, Sangeeta. "Memory, Identity, Patriarchy: Projecting a Past in the Memoirs of Sara Suleri and Michael Ondaatje." *Modern Fiction Studies* 39:1 (Spring 1993): 37-58.

Rooke, Constance. "Dog in a Grey Room: The Happy Ending of *Coming Through Slaughter*." *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje*. Ed. Sam Solecki Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1985.

Rubin, Gayle with Judith Butler. "Sexual Traffic: Interview." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6.2&3 (1994): 62-99.

Sarkar, Eileen. "Michael Ondaatje's *Billy the Kid*: The Esthetics of Violence." *World Literature Written in English* 12:2 (1973): 230-239.

Sarris, Fotios. "*In the Skin of a Lion:* Michael Ondaatje's Tenebristic Narrative." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 44 (Fall 1991): 183-201.

Scobie, Stephen. "*Coming Through Slaughter:* Fictional Magnets and Spider's Webs." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 12 (Fall 1978): 5-23.

---. "The Lies Stay In: A Review of *There's A Trick With A Krife I'm Learning To Do.*" *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje.* Ed. Sam Solecki. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985. 117-120.

---. "The Reading Lesson: Michael Ondaatje and the Patients of Desire." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (Summer 1994): 92-106.

---. "Two Authors in Search of a Character: bp Nichol and Michael Ondaatje." *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje.* Ed. Sam Solecki. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1985. 185-210.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

Siemerling, Winfried. *Discoveries of the Other: Alterity in the Work of Leonard Cohen, Hubert Aquin, Michael Ondaatje, and Nicole Brossard.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.

Sherzer, Dina. "Postmodernism and Feminisms." *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction.* Ed. Edmund J. Smyth. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1991. 156-168.

Simpson, D. Mark. "Minefield Readings: The Postcolonial *English Patient.*" *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (1994): 216-237.

Slopen, Beverly. "Michael Ondaatje." *Publishers Weekly* 5 (October 1992): 48-49.

Smith, A.J.M., ed. *The Collected Poems of Anne Wilkinson and a Prose Memoir.* Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada, 1968.

Smith, Stephen. "In the Skin of the Patient" (interview). *Quill and Quire.* 58:9 (1992): 69.

Solecki, Sam. "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje (1975)." *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje.* Ed. Sam Solecki. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1985. 13-27.

---. "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje (1984)." *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje.* Ed. Sam Solecki. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1985. 321-332.

---. "Making and Destroying: *Coming Through Slaughter* and Extremist Art." *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje.* Ed. Sam Solecki. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1985. 246-267.

Sugunasiri, Suwanda H. J. "'Sri Lankan' Canadian Poets: The Bourgeoisie That Fled the Revolution." *Canadian Literature* 132 (1992 Spring): 60-79.

Totosy de Zepetnek, Steven. "The English Patient: 'Truth is Stranger than Fiction'." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53 (1994): 141-153.

Trinh T. Minh-ha. *Woman, Native, Other.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Turner, Barbara. "In the skin of Michael Ondaatje: giving voice to a social conscience." *Quill and Quire* 53:5 (May 1987): 21-22.

Varsava, Jerry. "History and/or His Story? A Study of Two Canadian Biographical Fictions." *Postmodern Studies 3: History and Post-War Writing.* Ed. Theo D'haen and Hans Bertens. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990. 205-224.

Verhoeven, W.M. "Playing Hide and Seek in Language: Michael Ondaatje's Historiography of the Self." *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (Spring 1994): 21-38.

Van Nortwick, Thomas. *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled: The Second Self and the Hero's Journey in Ancient Epic.* New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Van Wart, Alice. "The Evolution of Form in Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Coming Through Slaughter.*" *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews.* 17 (Fall-Winter 1985): 1-28.

Wachtel, Eleanor. "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje." *Essays on Canadian Writing: Michael Ondaatje Issue* 53 (Summer 1994) 251-261.

Waldman, Nell. *Michael Ondaatje and His Works.* Toronto: ECW Press, 1980.

Watson, Sheila. "Michael Ondaatje: The Mechanization of Death." In *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje.* Ed. Sam Solecki. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1985.

Witten, Mark. "Billy, Buddy, and Michael: The Collected Writings of Michael Ondaatje Are a Composite Portrait of the Artist as a Private 'I'." *Books in Canada* (June/July 1977): 9-10, 12-13.

York, Lorraine Mary. *'The Other Side of Dailiness': Photography in Recent Canadian Fiction.* Toronto: ECW Press, 1988.

---. "Whirling Blindfolded in the House of Woman: Gender Politics in the Poetry and Fiction of Michael Ondaatje." *Essays on Canadian Writing: Michael Ondaatje Issue* 53 (Summer 1994) 71-91.

Zarb, Micol. "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje." *Scrivener* 17 (1993-1994): 64-73.